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## **THE COMINTERN AND THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS, 1928-1931**

*Richard C. Thornton*

The history of the years 1928-1931, when Moscow attempted to support the build-up of an armed Communist movement in China, has long been unclear. For those seeking to interpret the complex issues of this era, there have been few materials to work with, and many questions arise. Were the strategy and tactics of Chinese communism developed independently of direction from Moscow? What roles were played by Stalin and Mao Tse-tung? Even more basic: What actually was Comintern policy toward the Chinese Communists, and to what extent was it carried out? And what role did the leader of the CCP at that time, Li Li-san, play in these events?

This important new book is the first in-depth, almost week-by-week, analysis of these critical formative years of the Chinese Communist movement. Based on newly available source materials gathered by the author in Moscow, Taipei, and Hong Kong, and on interviews and correspondence with participants in the events, it marks a major contribution to our understanding of this history.

Focusing on the clouded issue of the "Li Li-san line," Professor Thornton brings us as close to the true story of



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# The Comintern and the Chinese Communists 1928-1931

by Richard C. Thornton

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*To Dale*





*History, for all its apparatus,  
appears to us primarily as a  
form of intuition. To each his  
own labyrinth.*

—Theodore Roethke



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RICHARD THORNTON

*Washington, D.C.*  
*March 22, 1969*





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# Introduction

The relationship of the Comintern and the Chinese Communists during the years from 1928 to 1931 is the story of a multifaceted conflict of ideals and self-interest. At one level there is Moscow's attempt to develop an armed Communist movement in China that it could utilize for its own ends. At another, lower, level, there are the conflicting efforts of the Communist leaders that were actually involved in bringing Moscow's policy to fruition. Apart from the common objective of building a powerful Communist movement in China, Li Li-san, Mao Tse-tung, Ch'en Shao-yü, and other leaders all had sharply differing ideas on who should lead the Chinese Communists in that effort. The subject of this book is thus Moscow's policy toward China, its relationship to the Chinese Communists who were striving to carry out that policy, and the conflict among the Chinese Communist leaders themselves over the timing and manner of executing Moscow's policy.

Although Mao Tse-tung plays an important role in this history, it is one in which he seems to stand offstage, affecting the outcome of the action taking place between the principal actors—the Comintern and Li Li-san, then leader of the Chinese Communist Party. It was in these years that the Mao-Moscow relationship became for the first time a vital

issue and one on which the reading of subsequent Chinese history hinges.

During these years, however, the Mao-Moscow issue was only one part of a dynamic, three-cornered situation. The relations between the Central Committee in Shanghai led by Li Li-san and the burgeoning soviet areas in the countryside, especially the one controlled by Mao Tse-tung, form the second corner of the triangle, and Li Li-san's relationship to Moscow forms the third. Underemphasis of any one aspect must distort the whole.

Conflicts of interest add a dimension to the drama of Comintern-Chinese Communist relations. Moscow's interest was in the build-up of a powerful Communist movement, which would serve the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union in the larger international struggle then taking place in Asia. Although individual Communists were important, Stalin was not committed to the support of any one party leader at the expense of a failure to execute the Comintern's policy, which was altered drastically after the breakdown of the KMT-CCP alliance in 1927. Forced to operate as an independent political entity after the break, the Chinese Communists were instructed at their Sixth Congress in 1928 to concentrate efforts on the creation of a military force, which would henceforth become the principal support of the Communist movement in China. A second important task assigned the party was the restoration of its organizational apparatus, which had been shattered by Chiang Kai-shek. These two directives: to re-establish the party's organizations and to build a Chinese "Red Army," though seemingly clear-cut, proved to be extremely difficult to apply because of the self interest of the Communist leaders involved.

Precisely because the party's organizational structure had been crippled by the break with the Kuomintang during the early months of the new policy, the various isolated groups of Communists that had survived the Kuomintang's attempts to exterminate them began to develop military forces independent of the newly appointed Central Committee's control and direction. This led to the development of power centers, "soviet areas," in the Chinese countryside not directly accountable to the Central Committee. In fact, the longer it required for the Central Committee to establish organizational control over the various soviet areas, the more difficult it became to do so, because the guerrilla movement on which they were based was growing in strength. Moreover, those soviet areas located a great distance from the headquarters of the

Central Committee were even less susceptible to "Central" control. Mao Tse-tung's soviet in the Ching-kang mountains was the farthest removed from the "Central" of all the soviet areas, fully five hundred miles from Shanghai.

As party leader, Li Li-san was charged with the twin directives of re-extending Central control over the movement and of building a Red Army. Li's dilemma was that if he supported the build-up of a Red Army before he controlled it, he would undercut his own political position and make it easier for those who did control the Red Army to displace him at some future date. On the other hand, if he did not support the build-up of a Red Army, Li would find himself in direct opposition to the Comintern. It was not in Li Li-san's interest to weaken his position vis-à-vis any Communist leader with aspirations to power. The "Li Li-san line" was therefore Li's attempt to resolve this dilemma.

Mao Tse-tung's interest, of course, was in maximizing his own position. By strengthening his fighting detachments, he increased his own power and also followed Comintern directives. At the same time, it was also in his interest to frustrate the attempts of the Central Committee to gain control over the military force that he was creating. The extent to which Mao's actions conformed to and/or contradicted Comintern directives and contributed to the development of the "Li Li-san line" is one important aspect of the history with which this book deals.

## II

The fundamental questions to be answered are: What was Comintern policy during the period? To what extent did the Li Li-san leadership carry out Moscow's policy? And what policies did Mao Tse-tung pursue? Russian, Chinese, and western writers who have concerned themselves with this subject answer these questions differently. To Russian writers, the Sixth Congress of the CCP set forth a policy for the Chinese Communists and, in their interpretation, this policy was "the creation of a Red Army, the organization of supporting revolutionary bases, and the accomplishment of the division of landlord land among the peasantry."<sup>1</sup> They maintain that "the main task of the party was to struggle for the

<sup>1</sup> L. V. Simonovskaia, G. B. Erenburg, M. F. Iureyev, *Ocherki istorii Kitaia* (Studies of the History of China), p. 297; for a similar treatment see A. S. Perevertailo *et al.* (eds.), *Ocherki istorii Kitaia v noveishee vremia* (Studies of the History of China in Contemporary Times), pp. 215-25.

masses" and charge that the policy followed by Li Li-san in 1930—a series of armed uprisings directed against large cities in an effort to overthrow the Kuomintang—was an anti-Comintern, putschist policy.<sup>2</sup> Their view of Mao's role in these events is that "the broad masses of the party membership, led by Mao Tse-tung, came out against this 'left' line."<sup>3</sup> Such are the main outlines of the Russian position.

Chinese writers agree with some parts of the Russian version but disagree with others. For instance, they agree with the general Russian interpretation of the Sixth Congress of the CCP that "the Party's tactics at that time were not to launch attacks and uprisings in the cities, but to win over the masses in preparation for the new revolutionary rise that would take place."<sup>4</sup> In disagreeing with the Russians, they point to certain shortcomings of the congress, declaring, among other things, that "it failed to reach an adequate understanding of the importance of rural bases . . ." and asserting that "after the congress Comrade Mao Tse-tung, both in practice and theory, solved correctly the important problems of the Chinese revolution which the congress had left unsolved or had dealt with incorrectly."<sup>5</sup> Mao Tse-tung himself later claimed that he "never supported" the Li Li-san line and that Li Li-san "labeled as 'absolutely erroneous' and 'localism and conservatism of peasant ideology' Comrade Mao Tse-tung's idea that for a long time we should employ our main forces to create rural bases. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Neither the Russians nor the Chinese acknowledge the Comintern's role in setting policy at the Sixth Congress of the CCP, yet it was held in Moscow under close Soviet supervision and control. There can be little doubt that the policies adopted by the Sixth Congress of the CCP were, in fact, the Comintern's. The Russians imply that the *Comintern* called for the establishment of revolutionary bases by saying that the congress did. The Chinese, on the other hand, while acknowledging the general importance of the congress held in Moscow, cite an inadequate understanding of the importance of rural bases as one of the congress' shortcomings and affirm that "after the congress" Mao Tse-tung "solved correctly" this shortcoming. The Russians attempt to dissemble their control over the Sixth Congress of the CCP; the Chinese, by claiming

<sup>2</sup> *Pu erh se wei k'e* (Bolshevik), May 10, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> Simonovskaia *et al.*, *Ocherki istorii Kitaia*, p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> Ho Kan-chih, *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution*, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, IV, 178–79.



that Mao himself independently formulated a correct policy *after* the congress, draw attention away from the congress as a policy-making body. The Russians disavow the Li Li-san line, while the Chinese state simply that Li was responsible for the policy of attacking large cities. Both Russians and Chinese dissociate themselves from the Li Li-san line and agree that Mao had nothing to do with it. The Chinese maintain, not unexpectedly, that the establishment of rural bases was "Mao Tse-tung's idea."

Russian and Chinese writers are in much closer agreement than most western writers, who take a radically different view, which I call the "scapegoat thesis."<sup>7</sup> Most western writers adhere to the view that the Comintern, at the Sixth Congress of the CCP, called for the rapid overthrow of the Nationalist regime and that Stalin designated Li Li-san to lead the CCP to carry out this policy. In the summer of 1930, when Li Li-san attempted large-scale armed urban insurrections and failed, he was dismissed from the party leadership as a scapegoat for Moscow's blunder in formulating such a policy. Mao Tse-tung opposed and eventually helped to unseat Li Li-san, Stalin's faithful servant.

On the basis of this interpretation, it is argued that Mao opposed Moscow and achieved his rise to power in the Chinese Communist movement "by dint of . . . his own successful strategy. . . ."<sup>8</sup> In short, for many western writers, this period of Chinese Communist history (1928-31) forms the basis for the historical proposition that "the political strategy of Mao Tse-tung was not planned in advance in Moscow, and even ran counter to tenets of orthodoxy which were still considered sacrosanct and inviolate in Moscow at the time when this strategy was first crystallized. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Only western writers tackle squarely the issue of Comintern direction of the Chinese Communists, but come to the surprising conclusion that Moscow called for armed uprisings to overthrow the Kuomintang—something which neither the Russians nor Chinese claim despite their

<sup>7</sup> The most outstanding study is by Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, chaps. ix, x. Others who have written in this vein are Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*; Robert C. North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*, and *Moscow and Chinese Communists*; John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China*; Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*; John E. Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition, 1927-1935*.

<sup>8</sup> Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 187.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



revolutionary predilections. Western writers declare that Li Li-san's policy was Moscow's; both Russians and Chinese dissociate themselves from the "Li Li-san line." Western writers argue that Mao opposed Moscow; neither the Russians nor the Chinese could admit this.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, there is little agreement between Communist and non-Communist writers, or, for that matter, among Communist historians themselves, although differences among the latter are more subtle.

Such widespread disagreement on fundamental questions calls for clarification and is the primary reason for this book.

<sup>10</sup> Until recently. See p. 224, note 11.

# Part One

Emergence  
of a New Policy  
for China



# 1 / Policy Debate within the Comintern

The break between the Chinese Communists and the Kuomintang in 1927 brought about a major shift in Comintern strategy for China. Previously the Comintern had directed the Chinese Communist Party to cooperate with the Kuomintang; after 1927 both competed for power as separate political units. The change in the political situation in China required a change in Comintern strategy. Discussion of various policy alternatives open to the Comintern began at the Fifteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in December, 1927, and continued through the Sixth World Comintern Congress of July-September, 1928. The alternatives put forward during this period reflected certain limits on the type of policy acceptable to the Comintern. Most important, there was no question of withdrawing from China. Nor was there any official doubt of an ultimately successful "socialist" revolution in China, by which was understood the establishment of a Chinese Communist regime. All policy proposals centered around the manner in which the revolution would proceed and develop after the defeat of the Chinese Communists by Chiang Kai-shek.

The main issue was whether the Chinese Communists should engineer an immediate and direct attempt to overthrow the newly established

#### 4/ Comintern and the Chinese Communists, 1928-31

Nationalist regime or defer action until they were stronger. Three alternatives were proposed by three different groups. What may be called the "extreme left" position in this revolutionary spectrum was led by Heinz Neumann, Besso Lominadze, and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai. This faction favored a vigorous policy of immediate action to overthrow the Nationalists. The "right," represented by Bukharin and Chang Kuo-t'ao,<sup>1</sup> proposed continued though limited cooperation between the Communists and petty-bourgeois elements in China as they saw no chance for the immediate victory of the Chinese revolution. Stalin, his man Pavel Mif, and—for the time being—Li Li-san, occupied an intermediate position in the policy they favored. Stalin was closer to the extreme left than to the right despite his alliance with the right. As we shall see in the next chapter, he advocated a policy of protracted guerrilla war in China.

#### *The Challenge from the Extreme Left*

##### *Lominadze's theory of permanent revolution*

From the Fifteenth Party Congress of the CPSU in December, 1927, through the Sixth World Comintern Congress in the summer of 1928, the left-extremists made a serious and sustained attempt to direct the Comintern's China policy onto a more revolutionary path of immediate action.<sup>2</sup> At the Fifteenth Party Congress, which convened from December 2 through 19, 1927, the main spokesman for a policy of immediate and direct attacks to overthrow the Nationalist regime in China was Besso Lominadze. He had just returned from China, where he and Heinz Neumann had been during the latter half of 1927, apparently directing the series of uprisings that the Chinese Communists attempted at this time. Lominadze returned to Moscow in time for the Fifteenth Party Congress. Neumann remained in China for the Canton uprising, which occurred while the congress was in session.

Speaking just after the Canton uprising had taken place, Lominadze said that the events at Canton were the "beginning of a new upsurge of the Chinese revolution" and argued that the Comintern's policy should be one of immediate armed uprisings to overthrow the reactionary

<sup>1</sup> Chang Kuo-t'ao. Correspondence with the author, April 29, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Borkenau, *European Communism*, pp. 78ff., and Robert Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, have described the activities of the "extreme left" factions in the Comintern and in the Russian Communist Party.

## 5/ Policy Debate within the Comintern

Nationalist regime.<sup>3</sup> He attempted to justify his proposal in terms of Marxist theory, but by a different schema than the one that held that all revolutions passed through the stages of feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Lominadze asserted that China was characterized by the Asiatic mode of production, not feudalism, and that the two were separate and distinct.<sup>4</sup> Under the Asiatic mode of production, society was atomized. This explained, he went on, the collapse of the Chinese bourgeoisie, which no longer represented "any united political force," and which existed only as "separate groups . . . commanded by separate militarists."<sup>5</sup> Attempting to show how favorable the situation in China was to a policy of immediate uprisings, which he claimed would propel the Chinese revolution directly into its "socialist phase," Lominadze went so far as to claim that the Kuomintang itself was so fragmented that it no longer existed as a political party. At this point in Lominadze's speech, Stalin—evidently to disassociate himself from this view—interrupted him to ask, "And what is left of the bourgeoisie?" Lominadze replied, "A few bourgeoisie were left. (Laughter.) A few groups of bourgeoisie were left."<sup>6</sup>

In brief, Lominadze's argument was as follows: Since China was characterized by the Asiatic mode of production, the bourgeoisie could not constitute an effective political force. Therefore, the Chinese revolution was not a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It was a workers' and peasants' revolution, which because of its "continuous, permanent character" would largely bypass the bourgeois-democratic stage and move into the socialist phase.<sup>7</sup> According to Lominadze, it followed that the policy the Comintern must adopt to secure this end was the use of immediate and continued armed uprisings.

Lominadze's theoretical analysis carried some interesting implications. If the revolution in China were passing from the Asiatic to the socialist stage, bypassing capitalism, then how could it be classified as a workers' and peasants' revolution? Would it not be simply a peasants'

<sup>3</sup> *Stenograficheskii otchet, shestoi kongress [a] Komintern* (Stenographic Report of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern), III, 469.

<sup>4</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, VIII, No. 1 (Jan. 5, 1928), p. 28 (hereafter cited as *Inprecor*).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Pavel Mif, *Chung kuo ke ming* (The Chinese Revolution), p. 202; see also *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 76. (Oct. 30, 1928), 1397.



revolt? If that were the case, where did the Communist Party fit in? There was an elementary flaw in Lominadze's position: To deny the existence of the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution in China was to deny the possibility of the development of a proletariat and any role in the revolution for the Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat.

It was perhaps with these implications in mind that delegates to the Congress challenged Lominadze's proposals. Pavel Mif, Stalin's China expert, and Nikolai Bukharin, head of the Comintern at the time, immediately attacked the theoretical underpinnings of Lominadze's position. First, Mif disputed the assertion that the Asiatic mode of production prevailed in China.

Comrade Lominadze has endeavored to oppose feudalism to the Asiatic method of production, in the sense that the latter has substituted [*sic*] feudalism in China. (Lominadze: "Marx has done that.") Marx did not oppose feudalism to the Asiatic method of production in this sense. Marx understood under Asiatic methods of production a variety of feudalism, and expressly stated that here there was no essential difference from ordinary feudalism, but only secondary differences of an external, partially historical, and juridical character.<sup>8</sup>

Next, Mif opposed Lominadze's assertion that the bourgeoisie no longer existed as a separate political force. "In China," said Mif, "the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat for hegemony commenced right at the beginning of the Chinese revolution" and

. . . those comrades who simply sweep away the bourgeoisie from the scene . . . actually sweep away the question of the ruthless struggle for hegemony in the Chinese revolution. The bourgeois tendencies have not ceased to exist in China, and the fight against them must be continued with unremitting energy. These bourgeois tendencies, striving for the liquidation of the revolution and the triumph of reaction, are not only unweakened but are assuming aggravated forms.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 1. (Jan. 5, 1928), 28. Marx may have been ambiguous about this, or Mif may have distorted Marx's position. At least in one place Marx does say that there are four separate and distinct modes of production: the Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes*, I, 363. For an expression of the view that the Soviets purposely misrepresent Marx on this point and why, see Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, chap. ix and *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 1 (Jan. 5, 1928), 28.



## 7/ Policy Debate within the Comintern

Mif thus opposed the two main theoretical propositions with which Lominadze supported his proposal for immediate armed uprisings in China. He maintained that Lominadze was in error when he said that the Asiatic mode of production prevailed in China and equally incorrect in saying that Marx held this view. It was Mif's, and indeed Stalin's, position that there was feudalism in China, that capitalist relations were developing there, and that the Chinese bourgeoisie, far from being a negligible political force, was stronger than ever before.

The Stalinist group must have believed that the views expressed by Lominadze represented a potentially serious threat to their own position, for Mif's criticism did not end with his comments at the Fifteenth Party Congress. He continued the attack in both *Bolshevik* and *Communist International*, two leading party journals. In *Bolshevik*, Lominadze was permitted to present his own case, with Mif's criticism appearing in the following article of the same issue.<sup>10</sup> These articles appeared just before the meeting of the Ninth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) in February, 1928, and both authors entreated the Executive Committee to decide in their favor. Later in 1928, while the Sixth Congress of the Comintern was in session, Mif went to even greater lengths in an article in *Communist International* to show that Marx viewed the Asiatic mode of production merely as a variant of feudalism and not as a separate stage of development, as Lominadze contended.<sup>11</sup>

At the Fifteenth Party Congress, Bukharin criticized Lominadze in a similar vein. To declare that the bourgeoisie was split up into various groups that were in mutual conflict, he said, was not at all to say that the bourgeoisie had been completely eliminated as a social class force.<sup>12</sup> Like Mif, Bukharin also criticized Lominadze's formulation of Chinese feudalism as "extremely vague." Classifying China as feudal or Asiatic, he said, had a close relationship to the estimate of the classes existing in China, "for the denial of the existence of feudalism has implied . . . the

<sup>10</sup> Besso Lominadze, "Novyi etap kitaiskoi revoliutsii i zadachi kitaiskikh kommunistov" (The New Stage of the Chinese Revolution and the Tasks of the Chinese Communists), pp. 86-107; Pavel Mif, "Spornie voprosii kitaiskoi revoliutsii" (The Contentious Questions of the Chinese Revolution), pp. 108-22, both in *Bolshevik*, No. 3-4 (1928).

<sup>11</sup> Pavel Mif, "Agrarnii vopros na VI s'ezde Kommunisticheskoi Partii Kitaia" (The Agrarian Question at the Sixth Congress of the CCP), *Kommunisticheskii International*, No. 43 (1928), pp. 38-47.

<sup>12</sup> *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 1 (Jan. 5, 1928), 33-34.

denial of the existence of a landowning class, and this denial has again led to other conclusions.”<sup>13</sup> These other conclusions were left unstated, but for Bukharin the implications of Lominadze’s argument were far-reaching. Bukharin, as can be seen from the detailed discussion below, was to propose a policy which would call for continued though limited cooperation with “petty-bourgeois” elements in China. If Lominadze’s thesis of a weak and insignificant bourgeoisie were declared valid, there would be little point in pursuing a policy of cooperation with them.

The Ninth Plenum of the ECCI, meeting some two months after the Fifteenth Party Congress, upheld the criticisms of Lominadze, labeling his view a mistake similar to the one Trotsky had made in 1905. The part of the resolution dealing with his argument reads as follows:

The characterization of the present phase of the Chinese revolution as one which has already grown into a Socialist revolution is incorrect. Equally incorrect is its characterization as a “permanent” revolution (the position taken by the representative of the Executive Committee of the Communist International [Lominadze]). The tendency to skip over the bourgeois-democratic phase of the revolution coupled with the simultaneous appraisal of the revolution as “permanent,” is a mistake similar to that made by Trotsky in 1905. This mistake is all the more harmful since such a formulation of the question ignores the profound national peculiarity of the Chinese revolution as a semi-colonial revolution.<sup>14</sup>

*The Extreme Left at the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (June–July, 1928)*

Stalin himself had co-authored the Ninth Plenum resolution cited above, clearly implying his rejection of proposals for immediate action to overthrow the Nationalist regime.<sup>15</sup> Yet this did not deter an extreme-left faction in the Chinese Communist Party from attempting to obtain a reversal of the position expressed in the Ninth Plenum resolution on the definition of the stage of the Chinese revolution at the time. Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai, who, with Lominadze and Neumann, apparently had planned and directed the uprisings in China during the latter part of 1927, but who had since been removed from his position as leader of the

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Bela Kun (ed.), *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional v dokumentakh* (The Communist International in Documents), II, 763 (hereafter cited as *KIVD*).

<sup>15</sup> “Resolution on the Chinese Question,” *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 16 (Mar. 15, 1928), 321.

## 9/ Policy Debate within the Comintern

Chinese Communist Party, was one of the extreme-left faction in the Chinese Communist Party opposing the Stalinist position.<sup>16</sup>

At the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held some four months after the Ninth Plenum, this extreme-left faction seems to have attempted to change the definition of the present stage of the Chinese revolution from "bourgeois-democratic" to "socialist," just as Lominadze had done at the Fifteenth Party Congress earlier. One argument made by this faction was merely a repetition of Lominadze's. The rejoinder given by Pavel Mif in the official Comintern organ was simply that the Ninth Plenum had already dealt with the question of "permanent revolution." He warned against taking the view that the Chinese revolution had skipped over a whole historical stage at a time when the "attention of the struggling masses must be focused upon the elimination of imperialist control and feudal institutions in China," that is, upon the main tasks of the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution and not the socialist.<sup>17</sup>

Another argument raised by the Chinese extreme leftists was that if the slogan of the redistribution of land were raised, then the revolution had to assume a socialist character. Mif disagreed, disposing of this argument by referring to the resolution of the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communists, in which it was stated that the new policy did not call for the redistribution of all the land but only for the confiscation of landlords' land.<sup>18</sup>

The final argument put forward by the extreme-left faction to support the view that the Chinese revolution was in a socialist stage was more formidable. The argument was that to a certain extent the Chinese revolution was anti-imperialist. To the extent that it was anti-imperialist,

<sup>16</sup> Other sources suggest that Ch'ü was a "terrorist" (Robert North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists*, p. 128), that he was the leader of a separate extremist faction in the left wing of the CCP, and that he was "influenced" by Lominadze (*Pu erh se wei k'e [Bolshevik]*, Vol. IV, No. 3 [May 10, 1931]; see pp. 13-14, "Li-san's report"; pp. 35-37, "Remarks of Ts'ai Ho-shen"; pp. 61-66, "Li-san's conclusions"). Conflict between the extreme left and the left proper is suggested by the fact that Li Li-san was one of the co-authors with Stalin of the Ninth Plenum resolution that Ch'ü opposed ("Resolutions on the Chinese Question," *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 16 [Mar. 15, 1928], 321). In the first draft of the resolution on the agrarian question, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai apparently attempted to inject the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, but it was eliminated from the final draft. See Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, p. 405.

<sup>17</sup> Pavel Mif, "VI s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Kitaia" (Sixth Congress of the CCP), *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 39-40 (1928), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

it was an international revolution, and to that extent a proletarian revolution. Given these premises, the extreme-left faction argued, the present stage of the revolution “bore the outlines” of a socialist revolution.<sup>19</sup> The reply to this argument was based on the orthodox theory of dual (two-stage) revolution. Expressing the official view, Mif said that the Chinese “comrades” had failed to note an important distinction. In the first phase—the bourgeois-democratic phase—the Chinese revolution was only an auxiliary force in the international revolution, and therefore it in itself could not be socialist. Only in its second phase—the socialist phase—would it become a “direct constituent part” of the international proletarian revolution and assume a socialist character.<sup>20</sup> But as yet, he maintained, the Chinese revolution was still in the bourgeois-democratic stage.

Hsiang Chung-fa, newly appointed General Secretary of the CCP and co-author with Stalin of the Ninth Plenum resolution, also repudiated the arguments put forth by this group. In his report to the congress on the Ninth Plenum, Hsiang reviled all those

who think that “the Chinese revolution has the character of a permanent revolution,” or that “now the revolution in China does not have a bourgeois-democratic character,” or that “now we have a workers’ and peasants’ revolution and if we consider it from the point of view of its content, its class motive force, we cannot call it a bourgeois-democratic revolution.”<sup>21</sup>

This was equivalent, Hsiang went on, to saying “that the revolution does not have a bourgeois-democratic character, but a socialist character.”<sup>22</sup> He emphasized the importance of recognizing the difference between the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and the dictatorship of the proletariat. “The former is the instrument of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, while the latter is the instrument of the proletarian revolution. That is why the Ninth Plenum said this was a bourgeois-democratic revolution in China.”<sup>23</sup>

Challenging the argument presented by Lomnadze at the Fifteenth

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Stenograficheskii otchet shestoi kongress Kommunisticheskoi Partii Kitaia* (Stenographic Report of the Sixth Congress of the CCP), I, 89–90 (hereafter referred to as *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.



Party Congress, Hsiang repeated much of the replies made by Mif. Was the Chinese bourgeoisie isolated and disunited? No, "this was not true. From the beginning of the revolution the Chinese bourgeoisie has been one of the motivating forces and even the leader of the revolution. If it were not a class, how could it lead the revolution?"<sup>24</sup> Some comrades, said Hsiang, could not comprehend the concentration of reactionary strength, "assuming that an immediate revolutionary situation exists in China now, that the bourgeoisie cannot create any concentrated reactionary force."<sup>25</sup> It was not true that the bourgeoisie constituted a disunited force, Hsiang averred, and quoted Marx, "the revolutionary party forces the unification of the party of the counterrevolution."<sup>26</sup>

A puzzling question arises here: Why did the extreme-left faction oppose the Comintern in these terms? What difference did it make whether the revolution were designated as bourgeois-democratic or socialist? What did this faction hope to accomplish by defining the Chinese revolution as being in a "socialist phase"? This was no mere academic exercise. As one Comintern official put it at the time, "The question of the character of the growing revolution in China has for us far from an academic character. The selection of the tasks of the revolution, the basic slogans, and our basic tactical line, all depend upon the resolution of this question."<sup>27</sup>

While a theoretical definition of the stage of the revolution would prescribe the policy to be followed, it also implied the limits to policy, and this implication may have been the main reason the extreme left argued so strenuously for a change in definition. Such policy limitations were pointed out in unmistakable terms at the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communists. In a lengthy (116 pages) and highly revealing speech about basic policy, an unidentified "representative of the Comintern" explained the refusal of the ECCI to sanction immediate action to attempt an overthrow of the Nationalists. During the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution,

. . . the task before the workers, peasants, and our party, the leader of the working class, is not to call for a direct seizure of power by the working class, it is not to destroy capitalism and to organize a socialist

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> Pavel Mif, "Spornie voprosii kitaiskoi revoliutsii," p. 119.

economy. That is to say the basis of the revolution at present is not socialist, it is not proletarian. . . . The present tasks are the elimination of feudal forces, the completion of the agrarian revolution, and the expulsion of imperialism. But these tasks cannot exceed the limits of the capitalist system. . . . They cannot exceed these limits because the task [of the bourgeois-democratic revolution] is only to eliminate the feudal system, not to eliminate the whole of the capitalist class. Its task is still not to attempt a seizure of power by the working class. [*t'a hai pu shih ch'i t'u i ko kung-jen chieh chi tou ch'u cheng ch'uan te jen wu.*]<sup>28</sup>

But there was more to making policy than making theoretical definitions. Defining the present stage of the revolution, though important, was insufficient grounds in itself for deciding on a tactical line. The balance of forces had to be reckoned. The speaker raised the issue of imperialism. "To take the strength of imperialism lightly, no matter what, is impossible." To do so would result in an incorrect tactical line and a "completely incorrect general political position."<sup>29</sup> True, the speaker continued, the imperialists were fighting among themselves for control of China, but they were united in their opposition to the Communists. Furthermore, the concentration of imperialist forces in China was now greater than ever before.<sup>30</sup>

Among the Nationalists, he went on, there were also many contending factions: The bourgeois landlords were struggling against the feudal warlords; the South was against the North; the Chiang faction against the former Wuhan faction, the Kwangtung faction, and so forth. "But comrades, do not forget that all of these factions alike are striving to slaughter us . . . to suppress the workers' and peasants' revolution." Their combined forces, the speaker continued, were greatly superior to those of the Communists.<sup>31</sup>

In deciding upon a tactical line, these circumstances had to be taken

<sup>28</sup> *Chung kuo ke ming yü chung kung ti jen wu* (The Chinese Revolution and the Tasks of the CCP), a political report delivered to the Sixth CCP Congress by an unidentified Comintern representative, pp. 36–37. Because of its importance, I quote from the speech at length. Theoretically, during the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution, the "working class" could not take power alone. However, it would be perfectly all right for the working class to take power in conjunction with some portion of the bourgeoisie. Recall, for instance, Lenin's formula for a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in 1905, when the revolution was still considered to be in its bourgeois-democratic stage.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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into consideration. "This is the position from which we should begin, not from some imaginary position," such as believing that the revolution would be victorious in a short time if only its present character were defined as socialist, or that "imperialism almost does not exist because the various factions of the bourgeoisie are struggling among themselves. . . . In this way nothing exists."<sup>32</sup>

The Comintern representative evaluated the present balance of forces as one in which a bloc of three groups was aligned against the Chinese Communists: the imperialists, the landlord-warlords, and the national bourgeoisie. "Because this kind of powerful new bloc has arisen, our strength organizationally and technically is weaker than theirs and, in certain respects, politically we are weaker as well."<sup>33</sup> He went on to say that the Chinese Communists must not underestimate the strength of the enemy or overestimate their own; if they did, they would certainly adopt an incorrect line.

Revolutionary courage does not consist in incessantly, under all conditions, making war. Revolutionary courage consists in making war only under certain conditions, or when a certain relationship of class forces makes war necessary.<sup>34</sup>

The Comintern representative said that the kind of "foolish, fetishistic doctrinaire" who sees every situation as revolutionary and who always raises the slogan of insurrection "is useless [!]."<sup>35</sup> In his concluding remarks the speaker explained that a revolution does not succeed overnight and suggested that in general the Chinese Communists were too impatient for victory.

The party believes that only by employing the method of insurrection to overthrow, fundamentally, the existing regime in China, by employing the method of violent armed struggle to oppose the strength of imperialism, by employing the method of an all-China great workers' and peasants' insurrection to expel imperialism and to destroy the power of the capitalist-feudal class, is there a possibility of moving out of present conditions. However, this is not to say that in the enormously large country of China, where there are many different provinces and many different conditions, in an extremely short period of time, in one or two days, hundreds of thousands of people will suddenly rise up; this

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

cannot happen. *An insurrection begins in some provinces and later spreads to other provinces; in some places it fails, in some places it succeeds, its area grows broader and larger; but this kind of situation, at present, still has not developed. Perhaps [China] must pass through a very long period before it can develop.*<sup>36</sup>

Now we have existing in some districts several soviets, which although they are very weak, do exist; this is good. In the future they will become centers around which the development of the revolutionary movement will be greater than in any other areas. This is completely correct. *But we cannot muddle together the matter of the victory of the Chinese revolution with the matter of the existence of several district soviets.* Although there now exist soviets in several provinces, although the comrades there have done good work, the Chinese revolution has suffered defeat; this is a definite fact.<sup>37</sup>

With these arguments the ECCI frustrated all attempts by the extreme-left faction in the Chinese Communist Party to redefine the revolution as having a Socialist character. In the tenor of these arguments an answer is suggested to the question of what the extreme-left faction hoped to gain by its arguments. If the revolution were recognized as being in its "socialist" phase, by definition the bourgeois-democratic stage would have been completed. Then the immediate task facing the Chinese Communists—the task which Lenin said faced the Bolsheviks in his April Theses in 1917—would be the assumption of state power.

*The Extreme Left at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern (July-September, 1928)*

The left-extremists had suffered three consecutive defeats: at the Fifteenth Party Congress, at the Ninth Plenum of the ECCI, and then at the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communists. Still, leaders of the left extremists considered the issue open and continued to press forward their views at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern. Lominadze recanted during the congress, but Heinz Neumann and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, the two other main leaders of the extreme left, expressed firm opposition to the Comintern's new China policy. However, they were forced to modify the arguments that had been deemed incorrect by the Stalin group on the three previous occasions.

Lominadze was criticized severely at the Comintern's Congress. Per-

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104 (emphasis supplied).



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haps as a result of this criticism, or pressure from the Stalin group, he repudiated his earlier proposals for immediate uprisings in China to overthrow the Nationalist regime. In making his statement, he contrasted his "incorrect" view with the newly adopted policy of the Comintern toward China.

In order not to arouse the impression that I want to cover up my own mistakes on the Chinese question . . . I must openly declare that, prior to the Ninth Plenum I made a serious mistake. . . . I did not look upon the Canton uprising as a rear-guard action, did not consider it to be the concluding engagement which wound up a whole period of the revolution, but I held it to be the beginning of a new upsurge of the Chinese revolution. Events have disproved this position. . . .

My mistakes consisted in that, proceeding from a false estimate of the situation, I continued after the Canton uprising to hold that the course for an immediate armed uprising was just as necessary as before the Canton uprising.

Now it is perfectly clear that this line was not tenable after the Canton uprising. The Ninth Plenum, and subsequently the Theses proposed to the Sixth World Congress, put this question absolutely correctly: the slogan for armed uprising can now be formulated only as a propaganda slogan. Only in those districts where there is a spontaneous peasant movement should the [Chinese] Communists put themselves at the head of these peasant uprisings, to consolidate and to strengthen themselves there.<sup>38</sup>

Lominadze's opposition to the Comintern's new China policy ends at this point. After the congress he was apparently assigned a post as a "youth leader," but in December, 1930, he was ousted from his position and charged with organizing an "anti-Party 'left' right bloc." He committed suicide in 1934.<sup>39</sup>

Neumann, who had since returned from China, did not capitulate as Lominadze had. He continued his opposition, presenting a highly sophisticated and convincing argument, buttressed by voluminous quotations from Marx and Lenin, for immediate action in China. His speech was so well stated that it was not challenged at the Congress; for the most part, it was simply ignored. Modifying the form of the argument earlier presented by Lominadze, but retaining its essence, Neumann

<sup>38</sup> The remarks of Lominadze at the fourteenth session, (*Stenograficheskie otchet shestoi kongress Komintern* [Stenographic Report of the Sixth (World) Comintern Congress]), III, 469; see also *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 53 (Aug. 23, 1928), 933.

<sup>39</sup> Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau*, pp. 400-401, 406; Daniels, *Conscience of the Revolution*, pp. 378-79, says 1936.

focused on the concept of the “non-capitalist path of development” for China and other colonial countries. In Lominadze’s argument, China was more “Asiatic” than feudal, and the Asiatic nature of the state precluded the development of a strong bourgeoisie. For these reasons he had argued that the Chinese revolution could not be bourgeois-democratic, that is, could not inaugurate a capitalist stage, and that a policy of immediate armed uprisings would succeed in pushing the revolution directly into its socialist phase, bypassing the capitalist phase.

Neumann avoided direct mention of China as Asiatic and agreed that the present stage of the revolution was bourgeois-democratic, but like Lominadze he argued that the Chinese bourgeoisie was a weak social force unable to solve the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Quoting from Lenin’s statement of the possibility of a noncapitalist path of development for colonial countries at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, and calling it one of the “keenest thoughts Lenin ever expressed,” Neumann maintained that with the assistance of the proletariat of the advanced countries China would be able largely to bypass the capitalist (bourgeois-democratic) stage on its way to communism.<sup>40</sup> He did not openly propose a policy of immediate armed uprisings in China. To have done so would have revealed his opposition to Stalin to all of the delegates at the Congress. Instead Neumann cleverly framed his remarks so that the only possible conclusion to be drawn was that a policy of immediate action was called for.

Professing agreement with the Ninth Plenum’s resolution on China, Neumann affirmed that there now existed the “soviet phase” of the revolution in China. But he said that

the soviet phase is only a political form; the content of this political form is the phase of the transition to the socialist revolution, which smashes the limits, the restrictions of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, even though this bourgeois-democratic revolution is still before us. . . . Whoever does not understand that, whoever only speaks of having a bourgeois-democratic revolution in China, whoever does not want to recognize that we are in the midst of the transition to the socialist revolution, is making a mistake.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The remarks of Neumann at the thirty-seventh session. (*Stenograficheskii otchet shestoi kongress Komintern, IV*, 380; for an English translation see *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 76 (Oct. 30, 1928), 1417–18.

<sup>41</sup> *Stenograficheskii otchet shestoi kongress Komintern, III*, 383; *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 76 (Oct. 30, 1928), 1418.

Again, quoting Lenin on the relationship between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist, Neumann pointed out that there was no sharp dividing line between the two, "the first grows over into the second. The second solves in passing the questions of the first."<sup>42</sup> According to Lenin, he said, it was the "fight" that determined how far the second succeeded in growing out over the first. But how, he asked, must this term "growing over" be understood? Of course, the revolution would grow over on the basis of the relation of class forces, and so forth. But, as Lenin said, on the basis of these class forces, "the fight decides and only the fight, about the transition to a higher phase of the revolution."<sup>43</sup>

In this way Neumann set forth his argument for immediate action in China. There could be no stopping the revolution, not even temporarily, "to solve the tasks" of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; the revolution must be continued, pushed on to the socialist phase. The conclusion to be drawn from this argument, of course, was that the ECCI should adopt a policy of pushing on to the socialist phase of the revolution in China, which could only mean a policy of "immediate action."

While Neumann's argument had little effect on the course of the discussions at the congress, it seems to have been the cause of some modification of the official line in the final "Theses on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern." There, in a paraphrase of Stalin's Ninth Plenum resolution, the Chinese revolution was designated as being in the bourgeois-democratic stage. However, a partial concession was made to Neumann on the necessity of the bourgeois-democratic revolution's "growing over" into a socialist revolution. Where the Ninth Plenum resolution stated that it was incorrect to characterize the present phase of the Chinese revolution "as one which has already grown into a socialist revolution,"<sup>44</sup> the final "Theses" said that the Chinese revolution was then in the bourgeois-democratic stage, "which unavoidably must *grow over* into the proletarian [stage]."<sup>45</sup> Still, what the "Theses" did not say was equally important. It did not say, as Neumann had proposed, that

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Stenograficheskii otchet . . .*, III, 384; *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 76 (Oct. 30, 1928), 1418.

<sup>44</sup> The Ninth Plenum, "Resolution on the Chinese Question," *KIVD*, p. 763.

<sup>45</sup> "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies," *KIVD*, p. 778; emphasis supplied.

the Chinese revolution was in the stage of the “transition to the socialist revolution.”<sup>46</sup>

Three days later, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai delivered his concluding remarks at the thirty-ninth session of the congress. As a member of the extreme-left faction, he undoubtedly believed that the Comintern should adopt a policy of immediate action in China, but he did not openly reiterate the theoretical arguments of Lominadze and Neumann that had already been repudiated. Instead, he expressed his differences with the Stalinist group principally on “pragmatic” grounds. To support his position Ch'ü drew on the “experience” of the Chinese revolution and avoided all mention of “theoretical stages” on which both Lominadze and Neumann had leaned heavily in their arguments.

Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai held that “in the near future there could be victorious uprisings in certain large cities.”<sup>47</sup> To bring these uprisings about he apparently wanted the Comintern to adopt a policy of instigating widespread peasant revolts directed by the Chinese Communist Party. At the same time, he asked for a de-emphasis of the anti-imperialist movement, firm opposition to the national bourgeoisie, and temporary alignment with the petty bourgeoisie (but far different from the rightist alignment proposed by Bukharin at the Fifteenth Congress of the CPSU in the previous year).

In what seems to have been an impassioned speech, Ch'ü asserted that the anti-imperialist movement in China had been ineffective. “What is the anti-imperialist movement?” he asked. It was simply a combination of boycotts, demonstrations, meetings, and strikes. The strike in Hong Kong, for instance, lasted for nearly two years, during which time the Chinese Communists had led demonstrations and all the rest.

But this did not put an end to imperialism, and we cannot say that we will overthrow imperialist rule in China if we continue to fight only by such methods. Imperialism can really be overthrown only if the proletariat can rouse the mass millions of peasantry under the slogan of the agrarian revolution.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Neumann's remarks at the thirty-seventh session. *Stenograficheskii otchet shestoi kongress Komintern, IV*, 384.

<sup>47</sup> *Pu chiu ti Chiang lai chiu k'e i tsai mo hsieh ta ch'eng shih ch'ü te pao tung ti sheng li*. Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, *To-yü te-hua* (Superfluous Words), p. 144, an appendix in Szu Ma-lo, *Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai ch'uan* (The Story of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai).

<sup>48</sup> The Concluding Remarks of Strakhov (Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai) at the thirty-ninth session. *Stenograficheskii otchet shestoi kongress Komintern, IV*, 494. An English translation that omits parts of Ch'ü's speech can be found in *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 77 (Nov. 6, 1928), 1474–76.



Ch'ü, like Lominadze and Neumann, argued the thesis of a weak bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie, he said, had betrayed the revolution and no longer deserved the support of the proletariat. Their betrayal, however, should not cloud the issue of their strength as a class force. "It is said now that probably the national bourgeoisie has already established its reign in China. But this is not so; it is so weak that even when it engages in counterrevolution, it does so with the help of the gentry and . . . under the leadership of the imperialists."<sup>49</sup> In fact, Ch'ü claimed, the past few years had witnessed the "denationalization" of the national bourgeoisie. Many had given up their factories, some had even sold them to the imperialists. Others had turned again to speculation in land and finance.<sup>50</sup>

The Communists must be unalterably opposed, Ch'ü maintained, to the so-called national bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was somewhat different. They could be led in the struggle against imperialism—so long as the struggle did not require anything more than demonstrations and meetings. "If we think that our task consists only in arranging demonstrations, meetings, and so forth, then, of course, we will always have a strong alliance with the petty bourgeoisie."<sup>51</sup> But the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie must not be confused with the rural and urban poor. "We must not be so foolish as to rouse the masses of the rural and urban poor only for demonstrations. We must rouse them for a more serious performance, beginning with ordinary activities, but not stopping short with these."<sup>52</sup> At the point where they went beyond mere demonstrations, at the "moment when the peasantry is rising in agrarian revolution, in uprisings," the Communists must be prepared to cast the petty bourgeoisie out.<sup>53</sup>

Emphasizing his main point, Ch'ü urged the Comintern to give its full support to the agrarian revolution, that is, to peasant insurrections in the countryside. In discussing this question, he revealed that the present party "membership exceeded 100,000 . . . of which the great majority were peasants."<sup>54</sup> This should not mean, he went on, that they must refuse further admission of peasants into the party, but emphasis should be placed on further broadening the "peasants' mass organizations, of

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 496–97.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 493.

course, simultaneously broadening the workers' organizations and drawing workers into the party. Only by this means can we guarantee the proletarian composition of our party."<sup>55</sup> Here, Ch'ü pointed to what he considered to be a serious shortcoming in the Comintern's new policy. He thought that the number of peasants organized for the agrarian revolution was too low, but that the number admitted into the party was too high. Ch'ü, it seems, held to an elitist conception of a Communist Party. He favored expending the peasants as cannon fodder in insurrections, but was reluctant to admit them as party members. He attempted to illustrate what he meant:

If local uprisings in the countryside or in districts are victorious, then soviets are organized. All participants in the soviets en masse immediately join the party. . . . In the majority of cases, the form of our soviets is identical with the party and the party with the soviets.<sup>56</sup>

"If," Ch'ü claimed, "nonparty peasant revolutionaries could be drawn into peasant associations and soviets [but not into the party], then our own party cadres and party organizations could be much more clearly organized."<sup>57</sup> Otherwise there was a distinct tendency, which had been manifested also in Communist parties other than the Chinese, for the party "to take the place of mass organizations."<sup>58</sup>

Toward the end of his speech, Ch'ü attempted to give some theoretical backing to his proposal of peasant insurrections by bringing up the theory of the "hinterland," or, as it was also known, the theory of the "world rural districts." The theory of the hinterland postulated that the growth of imperialism had not helped to develop "capitalist relations" in colonial countries; on the contrary, it had tended to retard such growth. According to the theory, colonial countries were becoming mere agrarian appendages for the imperialist countries. The imperialist countries were becoming world cities and the colonies were becoming world rural districts. The similarity between the hinterland theory and the "Asiatic" theory was evident, and the hinterland theory seems to have served the same purpose for Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai as the "Asiatic" theory did for Lominadze. It permitted the assertion that "capitalist relations" were not developing in China and that therefore not only the bourgeoisie

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

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but the proletariat, as well, was weak, if it existed at all. From this followed a policy of reliance on the peasantry, which was strong in agrarian countries, rather than on the proletariat, which was necessarily weak.

Ch'ü did not make explicit the conclusions that could be drawn from this theory. He stated only the initial premises.

I think after all that the problem of the national revolution becomes clear if one considers that the colonies are the world rural districts. If one takes into consideration that, on the whole, all of these colonies are agrarian and peasant countries, then we must realize that the [Communist] International requires a definite tactic in regard to the colonial peasantry as a whole. Only from this point of view can we work out proper tactics for the revolutionary movement in the East.<sup>59</sup>

However subtle Ch'ü may have believed himself to be in stating his position, there was slight chance that the Comintern would accept its premises. Lozovsky, one of Stalin's men who headed the international trade-union apparatus, had anticipated Ch'ü and dissected the implications behind the "hinterland" theory for Bolshevik policy a few days before.

If we speak of . . . colonies as "world rural districts" . . . all talk about proletarian and peasant dictatorship must cease automatically. In the "world rural districts," in the "continent of rural districts," there can be no industrial proletariat, and therefore no room for proletarian and peasant dictatorship. With such terminology the proletariat disappears as leader. [The proletariat] . . . could come into being only on the basis of the development—be it only a slow, meandering, and very painful development—of capitalist relations in the colonies.<sup>60</sup>

Without a proletariat a Communist Party could scarcely exist—theoretically. Lozovsky's deduction was irrefutable, and there was little Ch'ü could have said to offset his remarks. The wonder is that he even attempted to. Later, in the final "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies," the "world rural district" or "hinterland" argument that capitalist relations were not developing in the colonies was explicitly rejected. The "Theses" reaffirmed that "the export

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 500.

<sup>60</sup> Remarks of Comrade Lozovsky, *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 76 (Oct. 30, 1928), 1413.

of capital to the colonies accelerates the development of capitalist relations in them. . . . ”<sup>61</sup>

Thus ended the attempts by the extreme-left faction to direct the Comintern's China policy onto a path of immediate revolutionary action to overthrow the Nationalist government. Led by Lominadze, Neumann, and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, this faction had engaged in an extended conflict with the Stalinist group that lasted approximately ten months—from December, 1927, to September, 1928.

The left-extremists, as a group, had fought for the adoption of one particular policy—immediate action as opposed to deferred action, adopting theories that supported their policy position, discarding the theory when the policy was rejected, and then adopting a variant of the same theory in order to restate the same policy position in different form. Lominadze had argued bluntly at the Fifteenth Party Congress for immediate uprisings, but his proposal as well as the theory of “Asiatic” dominance on which he based it were unconditionally rejected by Stalin in the Ninth Plenum resolution on China of February, 1928. Some Chinese, including Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai himself,<sup>62</sup> had put forth proposals similar to Lominadze's at the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in June–July, 1928, but these arguments, too, were rejected by the ECCI. Neumann had been no more successful at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in July–September, 1928, even if he had been more subtle in proposing a policy of immediate action based on Lenin's argument at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 about the possibility of a “noncapitalist path of development” for colonial countries. Finally, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's attempts to gain support for what proved to be a policy of immediate action based on the “hinterland” theory were likewise unsuccessful. After long months of debate and argument, the Stalinist group in alliance with Bukharin and the “right” had defeated the “challenge from the left.”

### *Stalin and the Right*

Stalin's relation with the “right,” that is, with Bukharin, was complicated by his temporary alliance with it against the extreme left. During

<sup>61</sup> “Theses and Resolutions: Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies.” *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 88 (Dec. 12, 1928), 1662–64.

<sup>62</sup> *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress, I, 53–100; III, 64–93.



the period of the "challenge from the left," Stalin's dependence on this alliance led him to make certain concessions to maintain it. Some of these concessions can be discerned in his China policy, especially in the issue of cooperation with the petty bourgeoisie as proposed by Bukharin. Stalin went along with Bukharin's proposal until the usefulness of the alliance came to an end.

The left-extremists had argued, in effect, that the concept of the bourgeois-democratic revolution was irrelevant when applied to a colonial country like China. Bukharin did not dispute this conception. At the Fifteenth Party Congress, he accepted the designation of the present stage of the Chinese revolution as "bourgeois-democratic," but advocated a new alignment of "class forces"—the social groups with which the Chinese Communist Party could ally itself. He proposed a policy of continued but conditional support of the Chinese petty bourgeoisie.

Bukharin introduced his proposal by a seemingly irrelevant digression, discussing the conflict of views between Radek and Lenin over the Bolshevik attitude toward Ireland during World War I. Radek had held the position that since the revolutionary movement was led by the Irish bourgeoisie and not the working class, it was of little interest to the Bolsheviks. Lenin attacked this view, according to Bukharin, and voiced full support for the Irish revolutionary movement on the basis of his "dual action" strategy, which involved:

. . . firstly an action on the part of the nationally oppressed proletariat and the peasantry, together with the nationally oppressed bourgeoisie against the oppressor nation, and secondly an action on the part of the proletariat of the oppressor nation, or at least of the class-conscious portion thereof, against the bourgeoisie and any support the latter may find in the oppressor nation.<sup>63</sup>

Bukharin applied this "highly significant" formula of Lenin's to the Chinese revolution. In China, as previously in Ireland, a situation prevailed in which the national bourgeoisie was engaged in a fight against British imperialism. According to Lenin's formula, "dual action" tactics were employed. In Great Britain, the proletariat was to oppose the bourgeoisie; in China, the proletariat, peasantry, and nationally op-

<sup>63</sup> *Inprecor*, VII, No. 73 (Dec. 29, 1927), p. 1678.

pressed bourgeoisie were to oppose British imperialism.<sup>64</sup> But Bukharin believed the situation in China had changed. The national bourgeoisie had gone over to the counterrevolutionary camp, and this had changed the alignment of class forces, demanding a struggle by the proletariat, peasantry, and "part of the petty bourgeoisie in the cities" against the combined forces of foreign imperialists, the feudal class, and the national bourgeoisie.<sup>65</sup>

The response of the Stalin group to Bukharin's proposal can be understood in the framework of the general political situation. The Fifteenth Party Congress had been the scene of the complete defeat of the Trotskyite opposition, accomplished principally by means of an alliance between Stalin and Bukharin. While Stalin was still allied with Bukharin, especially at this crucial point in the political struggle with Trotsky, any disagreement with Bukharin could not be voiced openly, but was expressed indirectly through Pavel Mif. In the speech mentioned earlier in which Mif vehemently criticized Lominadze, he raised objections to Bukharin's proposals as well, without mentioning the latter by name. Concluding his comments on Lominadze, Mif said that his remarks were intended only to draw attention to the difficulties of the Chinese revolution. "This revolution cannot hope for the aid of the bourgeoisie. Not only will the bourgeoisie refuse to support it, but will rise in arms against it." The Communists must be prepared for a relatively "long lasting reaction of the bourgeoisie and large landowners in China."<sup>66</sup>

Mif agreed with Bukharin that it was the future relation of class forces that would decide the course of the Chinese revolution. Thus far the bourgeoisie and the landlords had been victorious, but the struggle was continuing, and was "directed at the present time mainly against the Chinese bourgeoisie [and] against the class of large landowners. . . ." There were sections of the Chinese peasantry as well, Mif believed, that would also join this reactionary grouping. . .

During the bourgeois-democratic epoch in Russia it was possible to calculate [*sic*] on the whole of the peasantry joining, to overthrow the large landowners, but in China this is not the case. Not only must

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1678-79.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1679.

<sup>66</sup> *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 1 (Jan. 5, 1928), 28.

## 25/ Policy Debate within the Comintern

certain strata of the peasantry, the kulak elements, be excluded from the main mass of the peasantry on whom we can depend [the poor peasantry], but the Chinese proletariat and this main mass of peasantry must fight from the beginning against the Chinese bourgeoisie.<sup>67</sup>

Concluding his comments, Mif said that it must be the duty of the Chinese Communists to isolate the bourgeoisie and landlords and to win over the broad masses. Furthermore, the agrarian revolution "can only reckon on the help of the village poor and must take up the struggle against the kulaks, the landowners, and the bourgeoisie."<sup>68</sup>

Bukharin replied to Mif directly. First, he said that he did not believe in the possibility, much less the probability, of a prolonged reaction in the form of an alliance of the bourgeoisie and landowners. A "Stolypin era" of land reform such as occurred in prerevolutionary Russia could not occur in China because the bourgeoisie had no land reserves with which to explore solutions to current agrarian problems. Second, he declared that Mif did not approach the question of the struggle against the Chinese kulak from the right aspect.<sup>69</sup> Bukharin insisted that the main issue was not the struggle against the kulak, or rich peasant, but against the landowners.

Of course it is obvious that the rich kulak, in such places where he sides with the landowner against the main mass of the peasantry . . . must be combated. But this is not how Comrade Mif states the question.<sup>70</sup>

Clearly, the exchange indicated some fundamental disagreement over the question of the alignment of class forces and the Chinese Communist Party's relationship to it. As expressed by Pavel Mif, Stalin's position apparently was that the Chinese Communist Party should follow a strict policy of united front from below with no cooperation with any part of the bourgeoisie. In practice (see chart below) this meant that in the countryside the Chinese Communists would ally only with the hired hands and the poor and middle peasants against the kulaks and the landowners. In the cities it meant that the Chinese Communists and the urban proletariat would oppose the bourgeoisie (without differentiating

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

between national and petty bourgeoisie), feudal warlords, and foreign imperialists.

<i>Countryside</i>	<i>Cities</i>
Landowners	Foreign imperialists
Kulaks (rich peasants)	Feudal warlords
Middle peasants	National bourgeoisie
Poor peasants	Petty bourgeoisie
Hired hands (rural proletariat)	Proletariat
Chinese Communists	

Bukharin's interpretation of what the new alignment of class forces should be was quite different. He postulated that in the countryside the Chinese Communists should ally with the hired hands, poor peasants, middle peasants, and that section of the kulaks that had not yet gone over to the landowners, to oppose the landowners and whatever section of the kulaks "sides with the landowner against the main mass of the peasantry." In the cities he urged cooperation between the Chinese Communists, the urban proletariat, and the "petty bourgeoisie . . . against the combined forces of foreign imperialists, the feudal class, and the national bourgeoisie."<sup>71</sup>

When the two positions are compared with the documents of the Ninth Plenum of the ECCI, the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, and the Sixth Comintern Congress, it appears that Stalin compromised with Bukharin on this issue. He agreed—for the time being—to Bukharin's proposals for limited cooperation between the Chinese Communists and petty-bourgeois elements in China in return for Bukharin's support against the extreme left, which was challenging his China policy.

In the Ninth Plenum resolution, in which Stalin's general China policy is adumbrated, there is no differentiation made between national and petty bourgeoisie. Apparently, Stalin had not yet decided to compromise on this issue, for the resolution states simply that the "bourgeoisie has not only made a definite bloc with the counterrevolutionary feudalists and militarists, but has actually reached an agreement with foreign imperialism."<sup>72</sup> If anything, these words suggest that there would be no compromise.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> "Resolution on the Chinese Question," *KIVD*, p. 763.



However, by the time the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party had ended, a shift in Stalin's position on the issue of cooperation with parts of the bourgeoisie in China had become evident. In the political resolution and in the resolution on the peasant question, Bukharin's policy proposal was accepted. In the section on the anti-imperialist and antimilitarist struggle, the political resolution reads that in its urban policy the Chinese Communists should actively "draw the broad mass of the working class and petty bourgeoisie" into the anti-imperialist movement, and further instructs the party to "split off a significant portion of the petty bourgeoisie . . . from the Kuomintang and the national bourgeoisie on the basis of the slogans of the anti-imperialist struggle."<sup>73</sup> In the resolution on the peasant question the shift is no less evident for the party's rural policy:

In places where the rich peasants have already become reactionary forces, the struggle against rich peasants should be carried on simultaneously with the struggle against warlords, landlords, gentry. As long as the rich peasants have not yet lost their revolutionary potentialities, as long as they struggle against the oppression of warlords and bureaucrats, the CCP should endeavour to absorb rich peasants into the struggle against warlords, landlords, and gentry. Where the rich peasants waver between revolution and counter-revolution, the party, so far as the struggle of poor peasants and hired hands is not handicapped, should not intensify the struggle against the rich peasants.<sup>74</sup>

This compromise on Stalin's part was duly carried out by the Chinese Communist leaders on their return to China. Central Circular No. 2, which is a Chinese condensation of the main resolutions adopted at the congress in Moscow, stated the new line. It read that the party "need not intentionally step up the struggle against the rich peasant, but should not abdicate the class struggle against the landlord characteristics of the rich peasants."<sup>75</sup> It also stated that the Sixth Congress of the Chinese

<sup>73</sup> *Programmnye dokumenty Kommunisticheskikh Partii vostoka* (Program Documents of Communist Parties of the East), p. 31; a Chinese translation can be found in *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang ti liu tz'u ch'üan kuo ta hui i ch'ieh an* (Resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the CCP), pp. 56-57; for an English translation see Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, p. 152 (hereafter the respective references will be: *Programmnye dokumenty*, *CCP Sixth Chinese text*, and *Documentary History*).

<sup>74</sup> *CCP Sixth Chinese text*, p. 178; *Documentary History*, p. 157.

<sup>75</sup> *Chung yang t'ung hsin ti erh hao* (Central Circular No. 2), "The Spirit and Conclusions of the CCP Sixth Congress," September 17, 1928, p. 4.

Communists had pointed out that the party should “unite with the petty bourgeoisie and rich peasants to oppose all reactionary forces.”<sup>76</sup>

Broadening the scope of analysis, it seems that Stalin was not the only one who compromised over the issue of cooperation or noncooperation with the bourgeoisie. While Stalin agreed to a policy of limited cooperation with the bourgeoisie in China, Bukharin also compromised by agreeing to a policy of noncooperation with the Social Democrats in Europe. In a speech in which he discussed the results of the Sixth Comintern Congress, Bukharin said that the leaders of the Social Democrats in Europe were then the “watchdogs of imperialism.” It was this attitude of social democracy, he said, that “conditioned the tactical change already decided upon by the Executive Committee of the Communist International previous to the congress . . . [which was a] turn towards a more energetic fight against social democracy.”<sup>77</sup>

At the Sixth Congress it became clear that this tactical change must be intensified and extended, because the tendencies of the social democratic parties to split the working class have become a general phenomenon. Our struggle against social democracy must be intensified. . . .<sup>78</sup>

In the same speech, Bukharin confirmed that cooperation even in the colonial countries could be only temporary. In some colonial countries certain temporary agreements with the bourgeoisie would be possible in some cases, but there could be no thought of any lasting agreement with them.<sup>79</sup>

Interestingly enough, although Bukharin compromised publicly, his private views about the desirability of continued cooperation with the bourgeoisie in Europe—the Social Democrats—remained unchanged. In a letter to the Swiss Comintern secretary Jules Humbert-Droz, who was even then being attacked by the Stalin group as a rightist-deviator, Bukharin expressed sympathy for the idea that the best interests of Communists in Europe would be served by alliances with the Social Democrats against the Fascists.<sup>80</sup> In the letter Bukharin apologized to Hum-

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. The idea of “uniting” with the rich peasant was an inaccurate interpretation of the policy, which subsequently led to considerable confusion (see chap. iv).

<sup>77</sup> *Inprecor*, VIII, No. 70 (Dec. 15, 1928), 1274.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1274.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1276.

<sup>80</sup> Bukharin to Humbert-Droz, September, 1928; Humbert-Droz Archive, quoted in Daniels, *Conscience of the Revolution*, pp. 335–36.



bert-Droz for being unable to espouse this view in public because of the delicate position he occupied within the Russian Communist Party.

Both men had altered their views for the sake of compromise. But as Stalin's political position became stronger over the next few months, it enabled him to dispense with his alliance with Bukharin and in the process dispense with his compromise on the issue of cooperation with the bourgeoisie as well. In June, 1929, roughly two months before Bukharin was formally expelled from the party, the Comintern sent a directive to the Chinese Communists ordering them to struggle resolutely against the Kulaks for the leadership of the peasant masses.<sup>81</sup> The line of limited cooperation with the petty bourgeoisie in China had been changed to complete opposition, the very position that Stalin had advocated through Mif at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December, 1927.

<sup>81</sup> Pavel Mif (ed.), *Strategiia i taktika Komintern v natsionalno-kolonialnoi revoliutsii na primere Kitaia* (Strategy and Tactics of the Comintern in the National-Colonial Revolution, e.g., China), pp. 236-45.

## 2 / Emergence of a New Policy for China

While Stalin opposed the extreme left and compromised with the right he developed his own position. The gradual emergence of his strategy for China can be seen best in the decisions of the ECCI Ninth Plenum on the Chinese question and in the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. These decisions—subsequently qualified and elaborated—appear to have been the basis for the strategy of “liberation war” that the Chinese Communists followed until coming to power in 1949.

It would be erroneous to assume that because Stalin opposed the extreme left his strategy was necessarily less revolutionary than theirs. The principal differences between the two lay in the time horizon projected by each for the completion of the revolution and in the initial tactics to be pursued. The extreme left expected the victorious establishment of a Chinese Communist regime as a direct consequence of immediate and widespread uprisings against the Chinese Nationalists, who they believed had not yet completely consolidated their government. Stalin, on the other hand, emphasized protracted guerrilla warfare—which implied a long-term process. Guerrilla warfare would require

years, perhaps decades, until the necessary forces could be accumulated to challenge the Kuomintang.

Immediate action to overthrow the Kuomintang would require direct attacks on the centers of state power—the large cities held by the Nationalists, a strategy not likely to succeed in the absence of a Communist military force even remotely comparable to that of the Kuomintang. Guerrilla warfare, however, would be waged in areas where the Kuomintang's military forces were weakest—in the countryside far removed from the centers of state power. Under such a strategy, attacks on the centers of state power would occur only when the military balance had been decisively altered in favor of the Chinese Communists. From the first Stalin adopted the idea of the gradual accumulation of a military force as the nucleus of his new strategy for China. The idea is suggested in the ECCI's Ninth Plenum resolution on China, co-authored by Stalin, which says that one of the main objectives of the Chinese Communists is the organization of "Red Army detachments in the expectation that these detachments will then gradually be unified into one general all-China Red Army."<sup>1</sup>

This, in itself, was a sharp departure from the previous strategy pursued by the ECCI in China. From 1923 to 1927 the ECCI had instructed the Chinese Communists to engage in a United Front, which involved cooperating with the Kuomintang in its drive to win state power in China while striving to gain control over that organization from within. The development of an independent Communist military force had not been a part of this strategy. Unfortunately for the Comintern and the Chinese Communists, in April, 1927, at a time when the Kuomintang substantially had attained its objectives but the Chinese Communists had not yet achieved internal takeover of the Kuomintang, Chiang Kai-shek had broken with his ostensible allies and begun a campaign to exterminate them. At this point the Chinese Communists turned to *ad hoc* military action in self defense.

Disorganized by the break with the Kuomintang, the Chinese Communists were tactically unprepared for it. Their actions in the months that followed displayed little evidence of the execution of a grand design

<sup>1</sup> "The Ninth Plenum Resolution on the Chinese Question," *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional v dokumentakh* (The Communist International in Documents) (hereafter cited as *KIVD*), p. 765.

directed by the Comintern.<sup>2</sup> Fleeing from the Kuomintang's "white terror"—the physical annihilation of Communists—remnants of the Chinese Communist leadership had hastily assembled whatever forces they could muster and made several attempts to upset the newly established Nationalist regime: the Nanchang uprising in August, the Autumn Harvest uprising in September, and the Canton uprising in December. All were unsuccessful. Many Communists, including Mao Tse-tung, then retreated to the comparative safety of mountainous South China—a bandit refuge for centuries—to reorganize their forces. Their fortunes were at a low ebb. Within a few months a powerful political force had been reduced almost to insignificance. This was the sequence of events that just preceded the Ninth Plenum of the ECCI. The altered situation clearly called for a new policy, and Stalin decided to bring forth his new strategy for China.

### *Stalin's Strategy for China*

When the Executive Committee of the Comintern convened its Ninth Plenum on February 9, 1928, the essentials of a new policy had already been worked out. Its basic components were adumbrated in the Ninth Plenum's Resolution on the Chinese Question of February 25, 1928,<sup>3</sup> which contained, first, an analysis of the current situation (points 1 through 4), then an outline of the new strategy (points 5 through 11). The resolution states the party's objectives in cities and countryside and suggests the military, political, organizational, and propaganda methods necessary to achieve the desired ends.

In analyzing the current situation, the ECCI maintained the theoretical formulation that it had postulated in 1922<sup>4</sup>—that the revolution in China was in its bourgeois-democratic stage. This meant that the immediate objectives of the Comintern still were to establish a dictatorship of workers and peasants, to complete the agrarian revolution, to eliminate all feudal relations, and to unify China. The resolution emphasized that the Chinese revolution was neither a "socialist" revolution, which would imply that the bourgeois-democratic stage had been skipped over, nor a

<sup>2</sup> See Martin S. Wilbur's "Ashes of Defeat," *The China Quarterly*, No. 18 (April–June, 1964), pp. 3–54.

<sup>3</sup> *KIVD*, pp. 763–67.

<sup>4</sup> *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang i hui tui shih chü hsian yen* (The First Manifesto of the CCP on the Current Situation), in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, p. 58.

“permanent” revolution, which would imply a policy of continuous and unabated armed insurrection in China.<sup>5</sup>

“The first wave of the broad revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants,” the resolution stated, “is over,” and had ended in “heavy defeats” for the revolution—especially for the Chinese Communists, leaders of the revolution. This situation, the resolution continued, marked “the transition of the entire mass revolutionary movement of China into its new, soviet phase.”<sup>6</sup>

The ECCI, in its resolution, went on to state that at the present time there was “no mighty upsurge of the revolutionary mass movement on a national scale,” but that “certain symptoms” indicated that the workers’ and peasants’ revolution was moving in the direction of a nationwide upsurge.<sup>7</sup> This prognosis was justified by the heroic insurrection of the Canton workers, the increasing number of mutinies among warlord armies, the complete political disorganization and continuous internecine warfare among the various militarist cliques, and “primarily by the development of the peasant movement in several districts (the sovietization of several districts . . .).”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the ECCI observed that the revolutionary movement in China “. . . proceeds unevenly in the various Chinese provinces with different historical conditions of struggle. It has, up to now, also developed unevenly in the towns and in the rural districts.”<sup>9</sup> The current soviet phase of the revolution was further characterized by the fact that while the peasant movement was developing, the workers’ movement was “experiencing a certain degree of depression.”<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese revolution was still bourgeois-democratic, but it had now entered a new, soviet phase, with a development of the peasant movement and a promise of accruals to Communist strength through troop defections from the armies of the warlords. While the long-run prospects for the revolution in China were good, the ECCI pointed out, at present the movement was uneven; in each province, town, and rural district, the revolutionary movement proceeded at a different rate of development.

<sup>5</sup> *KIVD*, p. 763.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* The Comintern apparently made its first call for the establishment of soviets the previous September.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 764.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



The use of the concept of “uneven development” appeared to imply that, for the present at least, there was no chance of a given condition existing on an all-China scale, and therefore no possibility that a nation-wide revolutionary situation could soon develop.

On the basis of this analysis the ECCI sketched the strategic policy that the Chinese Communists were to follow:

The party must prepare itself for the broad upsurge of a new revolutionary wave. This upsurge will inevitably confront the party with the direct practical task of organizing and leading the mass armed insurrection, because only through insurrection and the overthrow of the existing power can the tasks of the revolution be solved. But precisely for this purpose, and because of it, *the center of gravity of party activity at present lies in winning over the mass millions of workers and peasants*, their political enlightenment, their organization around the party and its slogans (the confiscation of landed estates, the eight-hour working day, the national unification of China and emancipation from the imperialist yoke, the overthrow of the existing power, the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, and the organization of soviets). The greatest danger in the entire present situation lies in the fact that the vanguard of the workers' and peasants' movement [i.e., the CCP], as a result of an incorrect appraisal of the present situation and an underestimation of the enemy forces, may break away from the masses, run too far ahead, pulverize its forces and allow itself to be smashed unit by unit. The Communist Party will surely be beaten and disorganized if it does not understand the entire necessity of winning over the masses and organizing them, if it does not oppose every effort to divert its attention from preparing the mass millions for a new, broad, revolutionary upsurge, *a preparation which constitutes the principal task of today*.<sup>11</sup>

The new strategy, then, was not to carry out immediate armed insurrections everywhere to topple the Nationalist Government, but, to prepare for the day when that became possible, by “winning over the masses and organizing them.”<sup>12</sup> Did this slogan imply the proscription of all military activity? The Comintern's leaders did oppose certain kinds of military activity, condemning “putschist practices” and “scattered and uncoordinated guerrilla actions,”<sup>13</sup> both of which were considered to be “playing with insurrection.”<sup>14</sup> The ECCI's position was that neither

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* (italics mine).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 765.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



putsches (attempts by small groups to seize state power) nor spontaneous but random peasant uprisings, even though led by the Communist Party, could become the "point of departure for a nationwide uprising"—the ultimate objective of Comintern strategy.<sup>15</sup>

The ECCI did not proscribe all military activity. The leaders of the Comintern urged the Chinese to engage in carefully planned guerrilla warfare in the villages and towns of the outlying countryside. "In organizing peasant actions," the resolution stipulated, "to which the party must devote serious attention in the future, it is always and undeviatingly necessary to take into account the various conditions of struggle in different provinces and parts of the territory of China," especially, the resolution continued, "in those districts in which Soviet power has already been established under Communist leadership."<sup>16</sup> The ECCI further postulated that the two main objectives for the Chinese Communists in the rural soviets were: the carrying out of the "agrarian revolution"<sup>17</sup> and the organization of "Red Army detachments in the expectation that these detachments will then be gradually unified into one general All-Chinese Red Army."<sup>18</sup> The military policy outlined here suggests guerrilla war, with rural soviets employed as bases from which to advance the struggle. The Ninth Plenum's resolution contains little more than a suggestion of this strategy. But this suggestion was to be developed into definite policy by the time that the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communists took place some four months later.

The slogan "winning over the masses" had concrete significance for the Chinese Communist Party's political work among the workers and peasants. It meant creating new Communist organizations and infiltrating existing non-Communist ones. In the cities the party was to organize trade unions by means of "workers' fraternities,"<sup>19</sup> Communist-front organizations that provided assistance to workers in return for the opportunity to expose them to Communist propaganda. In addition, the ECCI ordered the party to penetrate the legal and even the "Yellow" (Kuomintang) trade unions as another means of re-establishing the party's influence among the workers. Terrorism and commandism (forcing of strikes)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> See pp. 56–57 of this chapter for discussion.

<sup>18</sup> *KIVD*, p. 765.

<sup>19</sup> Jan Valtin (Richard Krebs) in his book *Out of the Night*, pp. 106ff., presents a discussion of the methods of "workers' fraternities" in Europe.

were to be abjured. In this period, when the party's objectives were to win over "the unquestioned support and complete confidence of the masses,"<sup>20</sup> terror and compulsion could only alienate them.

In the countryside as well, the ECCI outlined specific tasks for the Chinese Communists. Most important, the resolution stated, was the necessity of "creating and extending a network of peasant organizations (peasant leagues, committees, etc.)."<sup>21</sup> "Special attention," the ECCI noted, should be devoted to work among the poor peasantry, and a "special organization" should be created for the "proletarian elements of the village" (hired hands). Finally, the ECCI demanded that "more than ever before," the party should conduct systematic propaganda work among the masses in city and countryside to raise their level of class consciousness and to organize them under the party.<sup>22</sup>

The leaders of the Comintern deemed the reorganization of the Chinese Communist Party all important. They stated emphatically in the resolution that "the most important condition for the further development of the revolution is the over-all strengthening of the Communist Party of China itself, its cadres, its periphery, its center."<sup>23</sup> Specifically, the ECCI urged that the party recruit new members, strengthen contacts between the party's central and local organizations, and build a strong party apparatus. These, the resolution stressed, should be the immediate tasks of the day.

In the propaganda sphere, it went without saying, the Chinese Communist Party was to oppose unequivocally the Kuomintang regime. Further, the ECCI cautioned the Chinese leaders that they must also oppose the attempts of former Communists like T'an P'ing-shan to organize their own Communist parties. This "right-opportunist danger," the resolution stated, would be more easily neutralized the more effectively the party struggled "against the Left 'putschist' deviations in its own ranks."<sup>24</sup> The leaders of the Comintern seemed to think that the more central the position occupied by the CCP (as a result, to be sure, of the struggle against its own drift leftward), the greater would be its appeal to the masses, and consequently, the more difficult it would be for other political groups to obtain popular support. Just as important,

<sup>20</sup> *KIVD*, p. 765.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 766.

the ECCI emphasized, the party must oppose the Trotskyist view that the Chinese revolution had been "liquidated."<sup>25</sup> There must be no pessimism about the future of the Chinese revolution, nor any question that the Chinese Communist Party was its leader. Finally, formulating its international line for China, the ECCI made "it the duty of all sections" around the world to support the Chinese revolution by fighting "for the recall of troops and ships from China, against all attempts at annexation and the division of Chinese territory, [and] against the policy of throttling the Chinese revolutionary movement."<sup>26</sup>

On the basis of the Ninth Plenum's Resolution on the Chinese Question, the Comintern's general strategy can be summarized as follows: The Chinese Communists were to engage in carefully planned and coordinated guerrilla warfare against the Nationalist regime, utilizing rural soviets as base areas from which to carry on the struggle. Attempts at *coups d'état* or putsches, as well as unorganized peasant uprisings, were condemned by the ECCI as merely "playing with insurrection." In the towns and countryside (outside the soviet areas) the Comintern instructed the Chinese Communists to begin an extensive program of political subversion by establishing Communist organizations such as trade unions and peasant associations to compete with the Kuomintang for the support of the masses, and, by infiltrating all non-Communist mass organizations, to gain control over or at least neutralize them. In these subversive activities, the use of force and terror were to be avoided in favor of persuasion and propaganda. Finally, the party itself was to be reorganized in order to carry out these tasks more effectively.

There is nothing in the Ninth Plenum's resolution to suggest a stress on the policy of purely "urban insurrection," as opposed to insurrection in the countryside, especially if what is meant by this term are Communist-led uprisings in the larger cities like Peking, Shanghai, Tientsin, Canton, the Wuhan complex, Changsha, Nanking, and so forth. It does call for Communist-led guerrilla activity to be carried out over a large area, which, to be sure, encompasses towns and villages. Direct attacks on the centers of state power, the key industrial and administrative cities where Kuomintang strength was concentrated and where the position of the Kuomintang was far superior to that of the Chinese Communists, was not the immediate objective of the new strategy. Rather, as Chang

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 767.

Kuo-t'ao stated in correspondence with the author, Stalin's strategy for the Chinese Communists was for them to "occupy some outlying areas [pien ch'ü]"<sup>27</sup> far removed from easy striking range of Nationalist forces, which were quartered mostly in the larger cities. In the hinterland the Chinese Communists could, presumably, gradually build up the military-political power necessary to carry out a successful revolution with a minimum risk of annihilation by Kuomintang forces. (Of course the Kuomintang was able to frustrate most of these early attempts.)

The strategy of guerrilla war goes far toward explaining the distinction—and apparent contradiction—in Comintern directives between the proposition that the revolution must continue and the proposition that putschism must be avoided. The Ninth Plenum's resolution instructed that the revolution would be carried on by means of guerrilla warfare, political subversion, and so forth. A putsch, on the other hand, is an attempt by a small group to seize state power. In China, as in most countries, state power was located in the administrative and industrial centers of the larger cities. Therefore, the Comintern's warnings against putschism appear to be warnings against attempts to seize the larger cities, where state power was held by the Kuomintang. The larger, key cities would be the last bastions to be stormed when the balance of forces in the guerrilla war of attrition shifted in favor of the Chinese Communists. So long as the Kuomintang was stronger than the Communists in the larger cities, it was only prudent not to attack them in those places with inferior forces.

#### *Further Elaboration of a New Political Strategy*

The Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which was held in Moscow from June 18 until July 11, 1928,<sup>28</sup> gave shape to the Ninth Plenum's draft of the new strategy. The Comintern's leaders, evidently suspicious that not all of the Chinese Communists would agree to follow the new "line" permitted only a trusted few to attend the congress.<sup>29</sup> A

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence with author. April 29, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> A. S. Perevertailo *et al.* (eds.), *Ocherki istorii Kitaia v noveishee vremia*, p. 214. John E. Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition, 1927–1935*, p. 100, errs in stating that the Sixth Congress of the CCP took place from July to September, 1928. His treatment of both the Sixth Comintern Congress and the Sixth CCP Congress is based entirely on secondary sources; see pp. 99–104.

<sup>29</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai* (Red Stage), p. 64. According to Li, a former Communist who later came over to the Kuomintang and hence a hostile source, there was no faction opposing the Comintern at this time. Nevertheless, Li himself was



Russian source lists 118 Chinese attending the congress, an official Chinese Communist source lists 87, and a Western source lists only 50.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the correct figure, it is evident that many Chinese Communist leaders were excluded from the Sixth Congress.

The newly appointed leaders of the Chinese Communist Politburo delivered important policy speeches to the congress. Li Li-san spoke on the peasant question and again on agrarian policy.<sup>31</sup> Hsiang Chung-fa reported on the decisions of the Ninth Plenum and on the situation in the trade unions;<sup>32</sup> Chang Kuo-t'ao discussed the anti-imperialist movement.<sup>33</sup> Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai gave two lengthy speeches, on the transition to socialism and on the character of the Chinese revolution.<sup>34</sup> Hsiang Ying spoke on the current situation and also on the meaning of tactical uprisings.<sup>35</sup> Ts'ai Ho-shen made no formal presentation, but spoke up to dissociate himself from the views of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and to support Chang Kuo-t'ao.<sup>36</sup> (The clash between Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and Chang disclosed a broad cleavage in the party leadership of which more will be said later. The significance of this split was largely unrealized by the Comintern leadership, but it was one which affected many of the decisions Li Li-san was to make upon his return to China and determined the way in which the struggle to oust Li Li-san took shape in the latter months of 1930.)<sup>37</sup> Chou En-lai apparently was the congress' recording secretary<sup>38</sup> and gave no formal speech—at least he cannot be identified as a speaker from the record.

Indeed, the great majority of the Chinese participants are difficult if

not permitted to proceed to Moscow to attend the Sixth Congress. He and several others were detained en route to Irkutsk for a few days, then sent back to China.

<sup>30</sup> Perevertailo, *Ocherki istorii* . . . , p. 264; Wang Shih *et al.*, *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang li shih chien pien* (A Short History of the Chinese Communist Party), p. 105; Robert C. North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*, p. 110. Party membership is listed by North as 15,000 in 1928.

<sup>31</sup> *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress, II, 35ff.; IV, 38ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 89ff.; V, 37ff.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 1ff.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 53ff.; III, 64ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 47ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 44ff.; IV, 148ff.

<sup>37</sup> The unity of Chang, Ts'ai, and Hsiang Ying and this group's opposition to Ch'ü in particular but also to Li stand out in the stenographic record. For Chang on Ch'ü, see *ibid.*, II, 44, and IV, 148; Hsiang Ying on Li, *ibid.*, II, 48; and for Li on Chang, *ibid.*, II, 36, 44. See chaps. iii, ix (this volume) for further discussion of this party split.

<sup>38</sup> Wang Chien-min, *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang shih kao* (Draft History of the CCP), II, 2.



not impossible to identify. A few employed Russian pseudonyms, such as Strakhov by Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and Spiridonov by Chang Kuo-t'ao, but most appear in the record simply as nameless numbers. The Russian participants were noted either by initials, or by the vague and ambiguous designation "Comintern representative." A "Comrade M" (Pavel Mif?) delivered important speeches on the situation before and after the break with the Kuomintang and again on the question of the creation of a Chinese Red Army.<sup>39</sup> Another speaker, identified only as the "Comintern representative," gave the keynote speech to the congress referred to in Chapter 1 and made other comments on the strategy and tactics of the new revolutionary policy that was being adopted.<sup>40</sup>

Two particularly unusual aspects about the congress deserve mention. First is the surprisingly large volume of information available to Comintern leaders concerning the location and quality of the scattered remnants of Communist forces. Mao Tse-tung is a case in point. Although he was a relatively minor figure in the movement at this time, his whereabouts, activities, and the armed forces under his command were well known, a remarkable fact in view of the chaotic circumstances and the difficulties of communication in China.<sup>41</sup> The "Comrade M" mentioned above, in his speech on the creation of a Red Army, noted somewhat disparagingly that "Mao Tse-tung, during the Autumn uprisings in Hunan . . . had a sizable armed force but was always flying [*pereletaet*] from place to place; we call his army the flying army. He is continuously shifting his forces along the Hunan-Kiangsi border and now has approximately 1,000 troops."<sup>42</sup>

Li Li-san himself displayed an early awareness and wariness of Mao Tse-tung. Criticizing Mao's views on socialism, Li said,

On the agrarian program there is the question of land distribution. We have already had experience in Hai-lu-feng, and districts in Hunan and Hupeh, and so forth. But there are two reasons why the peasant

<sup>39</sup> *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress, IV, 1ff.; V, 1ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 9ff.; III, 93ff.

<sup>41</sup> For an opposite contention, see Samuel B. Griffiths, *Peking and People's Wars*, who says (p. 5), "we may doubt that [in late 1927] the Russian members of the International had even heard of him, except possibly as an untrustworthy deviationist. For Mao's prescription for the Chinese revolution differed radically from the line approved by Moscow."

<sup>42</sup> *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress, V, 12.

puts forth slogans [about socialism]. First, because he has petty-bourgeois illusions about socialism. . . . Second is that there is little land in China and many people and therefore the creation of an enormous number of lumpen-proletariat. These lumpen-proletariat in the countryside intend to restore their landownership. That's why they demand equal distribution. Again, it is because these lumpen-proletarian elements are under the influence of petty-bourgeois socialism. The majority of the delegates to this conference know that this obviously is not socialism, but for many Chinese comrades who are working in the peasant movement in China this is still not clear. I think that such a comrade is Mao Tse-tung. He possibly even now thinks that we have socialism because we have already raised that slogan. But we must point out that this is not only not socialism, it [*sic*] interferes with the development of actual socialism.<sup>43</sup>

The second unusual aspect to be mentioned is the skillful manipulation of the congress by its Russian hosts. While the CCP leaders gave important speeches, only superficially did they "lead" the discussions of the congress. Real direction lay with the Russian speakers, who dealt with the issues of the "general line" and establishment of a Red Army, and gave "follow-up" speeches on the topics treated by the Chinese Communist leaders. The procedure apparently was to have one of the Chinese leaders give the lead-off speech at a session and follow this with a speech on the same topic by a "Comintern representative," who would correct any mistaken impressions that may have been made. After this general discussion would ensue among those in attendance, not whether or not the policy should be accepted, but how it could be implemented. Such is the nature of the proceedings of the congress as reflected in the first five volumes of the stenographic record. The sixth and final volume comprises the resolutions "adopted" by the congress.<sup>44</sup>

However subtly managed, the policy contained in the congress' final resolutions was not conceived by the Chinese Communists, although they obviously assimilated and "sinified" it through their discussions. It was merely a crystallization of the ideas first disclosed in the Ninth Plenum's resolution. Even casual analysis of the congress' resolutions makes this fact plain. The most important resolutions, those which outlined the new Comintern strategy, were the political resolution, the resolution on the

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 50.

<sup>44</sup> For the resolutions in Chinese, see *CCP Sixth Chinese Text*.

peasant movement, the resolution on the problem of organizing soviets, and the resolution on the agrarian question.<sup>45</sup>

These resolutions will be discussed in detail, for the dominant opinion among the Western historians noted above is that the Comintern's directives in general were ambiguous to the point of being unintelligible at times—and purposely so. One writer asserts “that decision makers in Moscow contrived directives which could be interpreted to their advantage no matter what course events might take.”<sup>46</sup> It is my belief that with the proper concepts in mind these directives are eminently meaningful and in no way “contrived” to be ambiguous.

The political resolution is probably the most important of the four. It added detail to the basic thesis postulated in the Ninth Plenum's resolution and is a comprehensive statement of the Comintern's new strategy, touching on all aspects of the plan to be put into action. The resolutions on the peasant movement, the organization of soviets, and the agrarian question, on the other hand, are much more detailed than the political resolution, but are limited in scope to their respective subjects.

Part V of the political resolution—the immediate tasks of the Communist Party—provides a clear statement of the new strategy. In it are discussed the problems of the party's internal realignment, new tasks in the trade-union and peasant movements, policy in the soviet and non-soviet areas, propaganda tactics in the anti-imperialist movement, and so forth. The major tasks in the internal reform of the party were seen to be the following:<sup>47</sup>

First, the reconstruction of the party cells and local committees destroyed by the reaction. Special attention must be paid to the creation of party organization (cells) in heavy production units, factories, and

<sup>45</sup> Russian language translations of the political resolution, the resolution on the agrarian question, and the resolution on the organization of Soviets can be found in *Programmnye dokumenty*, pp. 14–68. Chinese translations of these and other resolutions of the CCP Sixth Congress can be found in *CCP Sixth Chinese Text*. Both of these are on file at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. English translations of the resolution on the peasant movement and the political resolution are given, not without errors, in Brandt, Schwartz, and Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, pp. 149–64.

<sup>46</sup> Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists*, p. 146; Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, more cautiously calls Comintern directives “slippery” (p. 128).

<sup>47</sup> The Russian language original of the political resolution is used here. The Chinese version contains ambiguities not found in the Russian. The English translation found in the *Documentary History* contains errors.

mills where the principal masses of the working class are concentrated.

Second, the development of an active campaign among the workers to recruit party members; the continuation of the policy of drawing the leaders of the workers' movement into the leadership of party work . . . .

Third, to carry out the principle of democratic centralism, guaranteeing, to the extent permissible under illegal conditions of work, inner party democracy, and to carry out the policy of establishing a collective form of discussion and decision making; at the same time to struggle against the ultra-democratic tendencies in several organizations, tendencies that can lead to the disruption of party discipline, to the growth of irresponsibility, and to the detriment of the authority of the leading party centers.

Fourth, to overcome all deviant attitudes in the [party] organizations toward cliquism and provincialism, which are harmful to the unity of the organization and lower its fighting ability; to liquidate the system of "punishment" of comrades for errors in their work; if they have no systematic line and do not maintain their errors, they should be corrected. Allow those comrades to come back to work, but [on the condition that] they must now adhere to the correct party line.

Fifth, to intensify the work of the theoretical education of the masses of party members in order to raise their political level . . . .

Sixth, to intensify propaganda for the correct tactical view of armed uprising,<sup>48</sup> and, similarly, for the problem of establishing soviets of workers', peasants', and soldiers' deputies.<sup>49</sup>

The instructions of the political resolution were equally precise on the party's tasks in the trade-union movement:

First, the basic task of the party is to struggle for the majority of the working class, for the active support of their vanguard—the party, for their confidence and conscious acceptance of its leadership. Special atten-

<sup>48</sup> The "correct tactical view" of armed uprisings was discussed in the political report by a "Comintern representative" to the Sixth Congress of the CCP, noted earlier, in which he said that an insurrectionary line should be continued, but that "the present meaning of the insurrectionary line is completely different from certain previous periods, like the Kwangtung uprising or the period directly preceding the Kwangtung uprising" (presumably the Nanchang and Autumn Harvest uprisings). *Chung kuo ke ming yü chung kung ti jen wu* (The Chinese Revolution and the Tasks of the CCP), April, 1929, p. 100.

<sup>49</sup> *Programmnye dokumenty*, pp. 28–29; *CCP Sixth Chinese Text*, pp. 49–50; compare *Documentary History's* translation, p. 149.



tion must be paid to the trade-union movement of industrial workers, and to the strengthening of the leading role of the proletariat in the peasant movement.

Second, to accomplish this task it is necessary to correct immediately some incorrect notions concerning relations between the working class and the party, which hold that the party, in its relations with the proletariat, stands apart from and is independent of the working class, commanding it. . . . It is still not fully recognized that the party is only the most forward, conscious element of the working class.

Third, to struggle decisively against the methods of compulsion and command in relations with our own class, against forcing involvement in the strike struggle or in armed uprisings . . . .

Fourth, exert maximum efforts, simultaneously, to work for the reconstruction and leadership of the revolutionary trade unions and to penetrate into all reactionary and other organizations . . . . This penetration is necessary to [achieve] the objective of winning over the masses.

Fifth, systematically work for the liberation of the working masses from the influence of Kuomintang ideology . . . .

Sixth, all of this work is the necessary precondition for the winning over of the masses. It must be carried out in the process of the struggle. It is necessary to strengthen as much as possible the [party's] leadership of the daily economic struggles of the working masses.<sup>50</sup>

Next were the instructions for the party's work in the peasant movement. The term "peasant movement," in the Comintern's lexicon of revolution, evidently referred principally to the events taking place in those areas of the vast countryside that were not subject to direct control by the Chinese Communists and were at least nominally controlled by the Kuomintang. The instruction below formed the basic policy by which the Chinese Communists could gradually bring this area under their control. The policy included the exacerbation of class differences, establishment of peasant organizations under Communist control, and the support of many of the peasants' demands for better conditions. When these activities bore fruit in the form of "spontaneous" peasant outbursts or uprisings, the Communists were to direct these peasant struggles

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29; pp. 51–52; and pp. 149–50, respectively.



along the same lines as the Communists' own guerrilla movement. Finally, in such areas of unrest, they were to attempt to establish soviets and to create detachments of a Red Army. The instructions were as follows:

First, the central slogan of the movement is the confiscation of all landlord land and its transfer over to soviets of peasant deputies.

Second, the strategic line: the principal enemy is the landlord-gentry; the basis of support of the proletariat in the countryside is the poor peasant; the middle peasant is a strong ally. It is incorrect to sharpen the struggle against the kulak at the present stage as it would efface the basic contradiction between the peasant and landlord classes. But this does not mean that we must abandon the class struggle with the kulak-semi-landowner.

Third, support, deepen, and unite the [non-Communist] peasant guerrilla movement. Lead it in the channel of [our] organized struggle for soviet power and the agrarian revolution. Coordinate the peasant movement with the struggle of the working class in the cities.

Fourth, the creation of a worker-peasant Red Army, which is possible at the present time as a result of the existing political situation, must be the center of attention of the party's work in that [part of] the countryside enveloped by the guerrilla movement. Success in this affair can be one of the decisive factors in the growth of a new revolutionary upsurge.

Fifth, increased attention must be given to peasant organizations (peasant unions, peasant committees, secret societies, and so forth). Strengthen the leading role of the proletariat in them.

Sixth, support the partial slogans of the peasant movement, such as the struggle against taxes, debts, conflicts over nonpayment of land, rents, or demands for their reduction.<sup>51</sup>

Those areas under the direct control of the Chinese Communists, the soviet areas, were to be consolidated to form the basis for further expansion of soviet power into nearby towns and the adjacent countryside. These areas were to have been softened beforehand by Communist activities (as described immediately above) so that they would be susceptible to Communist penetration. The party's tasks in the soviet areas were as follows:

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29–30; p. 53–54; and pp. 150–51, respectively.

First, the expansion of soviet centers, that is, the seizure and consolidation of areas, which can become bases for the further development of the mighty [soviet] movement.

Second, the maximum development of a regular worker-peasant Red Army.<sup>52</sup>

Third, the radical implementation of the agrarian program.<sup>53</sup>

Fourth, the creation of soviet apparatuses of power and the drawing of the masses into the administration of these soviet areas.<sup>54</sup>

Fifth, the decisive suppression of all counterrevolutionary attempts and the complete liquidation of the political and economic domination of the ruling classes.

Sixth, the establishment of maximum ties with nearby urban centers and the workers' movement.<sup>55</sup>

In propaganda activities, the Comintern directed the Chinese Communists to engage in a campaign designed to discredit the Nationalist government, alienate the people from the government, and play upon the existing conflicts in the social order. The party's chief tasks in this sphere were:

First, to struggle for the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement. To draw into the struggle the broad masses of the working class and petty bourgeoisie; to expose the national bourgeoisie as a force supporting imperialism. Combine the struggle against imperialism with the struggle against the Kuomintang and the Nationalist government.

Second, to achieve, under the conditions of the growth of the anti-imperialist movement, the legal or quasi-legal existence of revolutionary organizations of the working class . . . .

Third, to split off a significant portion of the petty bourgeoisie—handicraftsmen, artisans, small traders, those who do not exploit others' labor, part of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, the lumpen-proletariat, and so forth—from the Kuomintang and the national bourgeoisie on the basis of the slogans of the anti-imperialist struggle, the abolition of militaristic oppression, the maximum reduction of the tax burden . . . .

Fourth, to support the economic demands of office employees, ap-

<sup>52</sup> A separate resolution was devoted to this problem (see note 71).

<sup>53</sup> See p. 56–57 of this chapter.

<sup>54</sup> See note 71.

<sup>55</sup> *Programmnye dokumenty*, p. 30; *CCP Sixth Chinese Text*, pp. 54–55; and *Documentary History*, pp. 151–52.

prentices, and students in the arts and handicraft establishments, support the economic demands of the coolies . . . .<sup>56</sup>

The relationship of the political resolution to the ECCI's Ninth Plenum Resolution on the Chinese Question is explicit. By adding detail to the Ninth Plenum's outline, the political resolution brings out more clearly the main points of the Comintern's new revolutionary strategy. In brief, the Chinese Communist Party was called upon to establish or to re-establish its organizations (party cells, Red trade unions, peasant associations, and so forth) wherever possible. At the same time the Chinese Communists were to engage in a propaganda campaign to raise the theoretical level of their own party members, to win the masses away from the ideology of the Kuomintang, and to discredit the Nationalist government itself by identifying it as a tool of imperialism.

The Comintern instructed the Chinese Communists to play upon existing social conflicts, and, from the groups most likely to support them (workers, poor peasants, hired hands, students, and so forth), to recruit men for armed detachments that would be consolidated into a Chinese "Red Army" as time and circumstances allowed. Finally, the Chinese were instructed to establish soviet bases in the countryside, to consolidate them by carrying out the agrarian revolution (redistribution of land, elimination of ruling classes, and so forth) within the soviet areas, and to use these soviets as bases for further expansion of Communist power in the countryside. Guerrilla warfare was the primary method by which the Communists were to extend the area of the countryside under their control; soviets were the political instruments with which these areas could then be consolidated.

Judging from the Ninth Plenum's resolution and the political resolution of the CCP Sixth Congress, there is little ground for the argument that the Comintern commanded the Chinese Communist Party to strive for the recapture of its urban bases as its first task, so that the Chinese Communist Party could achieve "true proletarian hegemony" within its ranks.<sup>57</sup> The Comintern saw that its main opportunity lay in the countryside. True, the leaders of the Comintern called for the party to continue its activities in the cities—no conceivable opportunity was to be disregarded, but the party's role in the urban areas was to act as recruiters, drawing on the manpower pool in the cities, and to prevent the Nation-

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31; pp. 56-57; and p. 152, respectively.

<sup>57</sup> Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 127.

alist authorities from concentrating their full forces on the soviet bases in the countryside.<sup>58</sup> In view of the Kuomintang's superior position in the larger cities, it is unlikely that Communist activities in them were designed to capture complete political control. Urban activity in the larger cities was a diversionary tactic, one common in guerrilla warfare.

### *A Revolutionary Policy for the Countryside*

The scope of the political resolution was broad, covering all major aspects of the party's work for the coming period. The resolutions that follow, on the other hand, are all limited to specific topics. The resolution on the peasant movement deals mainly with the problem of gaining effective control over a given area; it outlines what policies to follow in the area which lay between the Communists-controlled soviets and the Kuomintang-controlled larger cities. The second resolution, on the organization of soviet power, deals mainly with the questions of how to stage an uprising in an area no longer under effective Kuomintang control, how to organize soviets after an uprising has been successfully staged, and how to build up a Red Army in that area. The third resolution, on the agrarian problem, deals mainly with the question of what economic and social policies should be carried out in the newly established soviet areas.

The resolution on the peasant movement takes as its point of departure the corresponding section in the preceding political resolution and discusses the various tasks raised by that resolution in meticulous detail. It constitutes the tactical line to be followed in the countryside outside the soviet areas. On the problem of class differentiation in the villages, the poor peasant was to be the basis of Communist strength. The leaders of the Comintern considered that the alliance of the poor peasantry and rural proletariat with the middle peasantry was the key to the success of the agrarian resolution. The tactic adopted toward the rich peasant, however, varied according to circumstances.

In places where the rich peasants have already become reactionary forces, the struggle against them should be carried on simultaneously with the struggle against warlords, landlords. . . .

As long as the rich peasants have not yet lost their revolutionary

<sup>58</sup> See James Cross, *Conflict in the Shadows, the Nature and Politics of Guerrilla War*, p. 53.



potentialities . . . the CCP should endeavor to absorb rich peasants into the struggle against warlords, landlords, and gentry. Where the rich peasants waver between revolution and counterrevolution, the party, so far as the struggle of poor peasants and hired farm hands is not handicapped, *should not intensify the struggle against the rich peasants*, thus driving them all the more quickly into the counterrevolutionary camp and making them the aggressive enemies of the revolution. The task of our party at the present stage is to neutralize this type of rich peasant in order to reduce the strength of the enemy; but the struggle of the poor peasants and hired farm hands should be carried on simultaneously, and no concession should be made to the rich peasants for the sake of the united front.<sup>59</sup>

The resolution also stated that the Chinese Communists should "support the slogan of equal distribution of land, but should also criticize it."<sup>60</sup> If the majority of the peasantry of a given area support this slogan, the resolution continued, the party should also support it, but the party must point out that real equality will be possible only after the completion of the proletarian revolution. Similarly, where the middle peasants are the majority, equal distribution of land should not be carried out by force, because this would only oppose their interests.<sup>61</sup>

The party must create independent organizations for the rural proletariat (hired hands) in the villages and enlarge and consolidate its leadership over the various peasant organizations such as the peasant associations, peasant committees, secret societies, and so forth.<sup>62</sup> It is these organizations, especially the peasant committees, which the party must prepare to become the nuclei of future soviet power.<sup>63</sup>

"Guerrilla warfare," the resolution continued, "will be the chief instrument of struggle,"<sup>64</sup> through which effective control over an area of the countryside could be established, soviets created, a Red Army built up, and the agrarian revolution carried out. However, the Comintern cautioned, there were weaknesses in guerrilla warfare as a form of struggle that must be corrected:

<sup>59</sup> *CCP Sixth Chinese Text*, pp. 177-78 (emphasis added). Note that the resolution states "should not intensify the struggle against the rich peasants." It does not call for an "alliance," which is the way Li Li-san later interpreted the policy, and was criticized for so doing.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



First, the conduct of guerrilla warfare separated from the masses has the effect of making them misunderstand the meaning of guerrilla warfare, or even respond to the propaganda of the landlords that guerrilla warfare is banditry. Hence, from now on, guerrilla warfare must begin with the spontaneous demand of the masses, and must be carried on simultaneously with propaganda and agitation work. Second, the tendency to destroy cities and kill, burn, and rob purposely [*sic*]. This tendency is only a reflection of a lumpen-proletariat and peasant mentality that may hamper the development of the party among the peasant masses or even among the proletariat. Therefore, every effort should be made to erase this erroneous concept within the party. Of course, our party should actively lead the peasant masses in their struggle to liquidate the landlords and gentry and to weaken the antirevolutionary forces. What is opposed by the party, however, is purposeless killing and burning that are irrelevant to our revolutionary mission. . . . Third, looseness and lack of organization. From now on, [we] must direct the peasant associations in a planned, organized, and centralized manner.<sup>65</sup>

Discussing the tactics to be employed in organizing local uprisings, the Chinese Communists were advised that under "the increasingly intensified class struggle at present, the setting up of a Soviet regime in one *hsien* [district] or several *hsien* is possible."<sup>66</sup> It should be noted here that nowhere in these resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communists is there advocated as immediate, practical policy the organizing of a *nationwide uprising* to overthrow the Nationalist regime. The slogan "setting up a soviet regime in one *hsien* or several *hsien*" obviously did not have this meaning, but rather meant the organizing of local revolts in small districts. Even the organizing of local revolts was to be done with extreme caution, and then only when the existing power in a given area was "tottering." "It is not necessary," the resolution went on

that guerrilla warfare should turn into local revolts. Only when, during the process of struggle, the vast peasant masses are mobilized, when there arises a genuine demand on the part of the masses for a political regime of their own, and when the reactionary forces in the area are actually tottering, can guerrilla warfare develop into local revolts. Therefore, when the guerrilla forces have brought a large area under their control, have secured the participation of a large number of people, and the conditions are ripe for producing a *hsien or municipal local revolt*, the party must consider carefully its objective conditions and subjective strength, and *proceed with the revolt well prepared*, well

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185-87.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

organized, well planned, employing suitable tactics and under the leadership [of the CCP] and with the cooperation of the workers of the *hsien* or municipality. After the success of the revolt, the slogan of the mass struggle should be put into effect, and all of the reactionary forces should be liquidated in order that still greater numbers of peasants and workers may be mobilized and the policies of the soviet regime be realized.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of the resolution on the peasant movement should not be underestimated. It provides the basic tactical plan by which the Chinese Communist Party was to extend its influence in the countryside. It states that effective control over an area must first be established by means of guerrilla warfare. Once the Kuomintang forces could no longer protect the area involved, the Communists could commence the next step. In conjunction with propaganda indicating that they were genuine revolutionaries and not bandits, as the Kuomintang called them, the Communists were to organize the *déclassé* elements against the ruling group and support their demands—to the extent, if feasible, of backing a local revolt. Of course, the party could engage in such activities only after the police power of the Kuomintang had been removed—but, then, that was the aim of the guerrilla activity.

Does the peasant resolution imply the prior endorsement of the whole so-called “Maoist” development of Chinese communism? It does not. To argue in the affirmative would be to claim clairvoyance for the Comintern. Posing the question in this way only circumvents the real issue,<sup>68</sup> for it certainly can be argued that the Comintern ordered the Chinese Communists to carry on a policy of guerrilla warfare in the countryside, thereby establishing the fundamental theoretical concepts that Mao Tse-tung was able to develop with success over the next two decades. In fact, Mao himself tacitly admitted that the Comintern supplied the correct strategical framework for the Chinese revolution in an article written in 1936. “Without answering this question,” he said, “of whether China’s revolutionary base areas and the Chinese Red Army could survive and develop, we could not have advanced a single step. The Sixth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1928 again gave the answer to the question. *Since then the Chinese revolu-*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187–88. Cf. Schwartz’s discussion of the resolution on the peasant movement in *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, pp. 123–24. The specific preparations are discussed in the resolution on the organization of Soviet power below (*italics added*).

<sup>68</sup> Schwartz in *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 124, interprets the issue differently.

*tionary movement has had a correct theoretical basis.*"<sup>69</sup> As already pointed out, the Sixth National Congress of the CCP was held in Moscow.

### *The Organization of Rural Soviets*

If the resolution on the peasant movement was mainly concerned with the problem of how to extend Communist control over a given district or area of the countryside, the resolution on the organization of soviets was mainly concerned with the tactics to be pursued after effective control over an area had been established.<sup>70</sup> How to prepare a given area for the establishment of soviets; how to create the soviet after a successful revolt; how to set about building a Red Army; how to suppress opposition to Communist rule in a soviet; how to ensure that party policies would be carried out, while giving the impression that policies were democratically decided upon by the "citizens" of the soviets—these questions were discussed in the following resolution.

When the party decides, reads the resolution, that conditions exist in a given area for a successful revolt, it must undertake the task of establishing cells in that area, "so that these cells, after the seizure of power, are prepared for all necessary work."<sup>71</sup> In all probability, the resolution added, these cells will form the basis for the establishment of soviet power.

"In all the areas where uprisings are planned," the party must disseminate, in advance, propaganda explaining the content of soviet rule.

Outside of propaganda work, the party must carry out organizational work. Here can be used the old example of Shanghai, where delegates from the masses were elected secretly at meetings before the seizure of power. However, under present conditions of the underground in China, it is difficult to affirm that it is possible to elect power by such means. In all probability these conditions do not exist. Therefore . . . the party must carry out advance preparations through cells, individual party members and through reliable workers. . . .<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Mao Tse-tung hsüan-chi* (The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung), I, 182 (italics added) (hereafter cited as *Mao SW*).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition*, p. 102, who claims that the establishment of soviets was *not* part of the policy set forth at the Sixth Congress of the CCP.

<sup>71</sup> "Resolution on the Question of Organizing Soviet Power," *Programmnye dokumenty*, pp. 51–68. The quotation is from p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Until the formal establishment of a soviet in a given area, "the primary form of political power is the provisional power, that is, the Revolutionary Committee."<sup>73</sup> The Revolutionary Committee must be composed of the representatives of the various organizations taking part in a planned uprising. All responsibility for the uprising must be delegated to the Revolutionary Committee and to its headquarters. The headquarters must come under the control of the Revolutionary Committee and be quickly convertible to a headquarters of the Red Army. The headquarters must lead all military activities in its region, prepare the mobilization of workers, organize supply for the Red Army, and so forth.<sup>74</sup> Under no circumstances should the Revolutionary Committee come into conflict with the peasant associations, because these associations were the basis for the organization of soviets and their support was vital.<sup>75</sup>

As soon as a revolt was successful, the Revolutionary Committee must quickly begin work for the transformation of power to the official soviet. It must be understood, the resolution stated, that the Revolutionary Committee was only a temporary government. It organizes the soviet, whose members, at their first meeting, would declare themselves to be the official government. Of course, the resolution went on,

. . . the composition of the Revolutionary Committees must absolutely guarantee the fulfillment of party directives. Elements having influence among the soldiers or among the local population must take part in the work of the Revolutionary Committees, but if, from the first, they cannot firmly guarantee the strengthening of our party's influence, then we must take measures to isolate them and to prepare various means of excluding them from the Revolutionary Committees at the appropriate moment.<sup>76</sup>

In the very first days after the establishment of a soviet in an area, the Revolutionary Committee with the help of the party "must reorganize the troops taking part in the uprising into a regular Red Army."<sup>77</sup> At first, the resolution continued, "revolutionary elements of peasant committees

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54. The revolutionary committee being formed in the current "cultural revolution" bears a close resemblance in structure and function to the revolutionary committee called for in the resolution.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.



and trade unions” as well as “hopeful” elements could be recruited. Later, after the Red Army had become established in the area, enlistment for a “definite number of years” could be allowed.<sup>78</sup> Independent guerrilla units that take part in the uprising from that particular area must also be formed into regular army units and their command and political composition reorganized.<sup>79</sup>

After an uprising, revolutionary measures must be taken immediately. All bandits must be disarmed and suppressed—even if they assisted in the uprising—to prevent any resurgence of opposition to the soviet regime.<sup>80</sup> Attempts should be made to win the masses away from religious and semireligious organizations, like the Red Spears, and so forth, their leaders should be isolated and, at the appropriate moment, reorganized under soviet control.<sup>81</sup> Of course, all known counterrevolutionary leaders must be taken as hostages as soon as possible.<sup>82</sup>

Judging from this resolution, the concept of “proletarian hegemony”—the control of the Communist movement by party members from the working class—was, perhaps, an ideal condition for which to strive, but not an immediate practical possibility. The resolution goes on to state that from the peasants, workers, and guerrillas taking part in a given uprising, the party must create a cadre of military leaders and political workers. Officers from the old army could be used in the cadre, the resolution continued, because of their understanding of military affairs. Only lower ranking officers should be used; the military understanding of the higher ranking officers was already obsolete.<sup>83</sup> “Political workers and members of political committees play an important role. This work can be done only by members of the Communist Party. Best of all, place party members from the working class or peasant leaseholders (tenants) in this work.”<sup>84</sup> It appears that a party member was acceptable for work in the important political committees even if he were a peasant.

The soviets themselves must be organized on the basis of a direct vote by the toiling masses of the area and must ensure the leading role of the workers. Soviets like the one in Hai-lu-feng and, in part, like the one in

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*



Shanghai should be established, but not like the Canton Soviet "where, in fact, there was only a revolutionary committee and no soviet."<sup>85</sup> Soviets should not be comprised of representatives of only the highest organizations, but its members should be elected at meetings of all of the toiling masses—workers, poor peasants, members of trade unions, handicraftsmen, and so forth.

The soviet was not merely a "mass meeting," nor was it an "organization of several leaders." It was to be a governing body composed of representatives from the toiling masses. The number of members of the executive committee of a soviet should be from eleven to twenty-seven. From this group should be elected a "presidium," which holds actual power in a given area. The number of members in a presidium should be from five to seven.<sup>86</sup> Once a soviet was elected, it should establish various sections to carry out its governmental functions: sections for military affairs, financial, economic and social affairs, and so forth.<sup>87</sup> It was emphasized again that there must be a party fraction in every organ, and that "the party fractions of these organs absolutely must fulfill the directives of the party."<sup>88</sup>

"In all soviets the party must have a party fraction. It is by means of these party fractions, through statements by party members, that the opinion of the party is expressed on the various questions of Soviet work."<sup>89</sup> Communists working in the soviets should openly work to raise the influence of the party in them, by leading the work of the soviet.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, the basic objective of the soviets and the guerrilla movement as a whole was seen to be the gradual expansion of the territory controlled by the Communists and the gradual denial of control over territory to the Kuomintang.

The important task of the revolutionary committees, party committees, and soviets in their respective localities is the expansion of their territory. This is the basic guarantee of their existence. The expansion of territory can be carried on in two directions: first, soviets should employ military force to carry out attacks on neighboring areas;

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[second] they should render assistance to mass uprisings in neighboring areas. . . . This activity should be connected with the activity of the Red Army.<sup>91</sup>

### *Agrarian Reform and Communist Power*

Having described the methods by which the Chinese Communists were to gain control over a given area and to organize a soviet in that area, the Congress, in the resolution on the agrarian question, proceeded to instruct the Chinese Communists in the basic economic and social policies of the agrarian program to be followed inside each soviet thus established.<sup>92</sup> In effect, the aim of the agrarian program was the complete and utter destruction of the existing social and economic order under the control of each soviet and the establishment of a new order based on a fundamental redistribution of land in favor of the poor and landless elements. Since the poor and landless generally constituted a majority, they would become a source of support for the Communists. The policies, which constituted the Communist agrarian program, were:

First, the overthrow of the power of the landowning gentry and bureaucrats . . . the arming of the peasantry, and the establishment of the soviets of peasants' deputies. . . .

Second, the immediate abolition of landlord ownership of land without compensation; the seizure of land must be carried out under the direction of the local soviets of peasants' deputies, which will redistribute the land for use by the landless peasants and peasants with little land.

Third, the transfer of ancestral temples, monasteries and other kinds of public lands, as well as empty and sandy land of a given [soviet] area to the soviet of peasants' deputies for redistribution among local peasants for their use.

Fourth, the creation of a special land fund from local governmental and other lands and a colonization fund for allotment to soldiers of the worker's-peasant's army. . . .

Fifth, the declaration of all usurious loans as invalid.

Sixth, the abolition of all land and other one-sided agreements [entered into by] either oral or written transactions.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, "Resolution on the Agrarian Question," pp. 34-50.

Seventh, the abolition of all taxes and requisitions collected by militarists and local powers. The elimination of the farm tax system and the establishment of a unified progressive tax.

Eighth, state assistance to agriculture:

- (a) organization of agriculture,
- (b) improvement and expansion of the irrigation system,
- (c) assistance in the struggle with natural calamities,
- (d) governmental organization of migration,
- (e) organization of cheap credit through agricultural banks and credit cooperatives,
- (f) organization of market and supply cooperatives, and
- (g) establishment of a unified monetary system and a unified system of weights and measures.<sup>93</sup>

The effect of these policies, if carried out, would be immediate improvement of the individual peasant's lot, even if only for the short run and if only a little. However rudimentary the reforms may have appeared, it is conceivable that many peasants would come to believe that the revolutionaries were worth supporting because of them. This belief would then be heightened to a conviction if the local regime, upon its recapture of the area, attempted to undo these "reforms" and restore the status quo ante. Unless the legal government were able to convince the local populace that its actions were the only proper course, or make its own policies more attractive to them, then the areas once occupied by the Communists, even though recaptured by the government, would be a permanent source of support—either active or passive—for the Communists.

Comintern strategy was suited to the conditions in which it was to be applied. In highly industrialized western Europe, for instance, the Comintern directed its parties to concentrate their activities among the masses of industrial workers in the cities. In China, where urban industrial workers were few, the Comintern emphasized the countryside. The Comintern particularly directed the Chinese Communists to carry out a policy of guerrilla warfare in the countryside and political subversion of the cities.

The Comintern directed the Chinese Communists to establish soviet bases in the countryside out of easy reach of Kuomintang forces, to

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

consolidate them by carrying out the “agrarian program” within the soviet base areas, and to create, arm, and train small fighting detachments, which in the course of the guerrilla war would be merged to form a Chinese “Red Army.” Once soviet bases were consolidated in one locality, the Chinese Communists were to repeat the process in an adjacent area, gradually expanding the territory under their control.<sup>94</sup> The build-up of Communist power in the countryside appears to have been the main focus of the Comintern’s new strategy for the Chinese Communists.

In the Comintern’s new strategy, Chinese Communist activities in the larger cities were designed to prevent the Kuomintang from concentrating its efforts on the main force of the Chinese Communists in the countryside. Strikes, propaganda, terror, and subversion were to be employed to keep the cities in turmoil. In terms of the strategy as a whole the Communist Party’s urban activities played a key diversionary role.

The immediate objective of the Comintern was not the rapid overthrow of the Nationalist regime by means of armed uprisings in the larger cities all over China. The Comintern envisaged a protracted struggle, during which the Communists would gradually weaken the Kuomintang and build up their own strength. The strategy analyzed above is the essence of the one which Mao Tse-tung developed and perhaps refined in his conquest of China. The analysis shows beyond all doubt that from the Sixth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1928 onward, the Comintern instructed the Chinese Communists to carry out a broadly conceived, sophisticated strategy of guerrilla warfare and political subversion.

To carry out the new policy the Comintern appointed a new CCP leadership. Li Li-san, Hsiang Chung-fa, Chou En-lai, Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai,

<sup>94</sup> The current Soviet view of Comintern policy is of interest. In one of a series of highly revealing articles on Chinese Communist history the view is expressed that “the strategy and tactics of the Chinese revolution . . . put forward in the twenties and thirties in the documents of the Comintern and CPSU were of invaluable importance for the CCP. . . . A great contribution was also made to the working out of such important problems as the building of the party, the hegemony of the working class and its allies under the conditions of China, the role of peasantry in the Chinese revolution, the united anti-imperialist front, the creation of revolutionary bases in rural areas, and the building of the Chinese Red Army.” See O. Vladimir and V. Riazantsev, “O nekotorykh voprosakh istorii kompartii Kitaia” (On Several Questions of the History of the CCP), *Kommunist*, No. 9 (June, 1968), pp. 94–95.

Chang Kuo-t'ao, Ts'ai Ho-shen and Hsiang Ying<sup>95</sup> made up the new CCP Politburo. The selection of the new Politburo will be discussed in the next chapter, but it should be noted here that although Hsiang Chung-fa was named General Secretary of the party, he was a figure-head; Li Li-san held the reins of power.<sup>96</sup> In the fall of 1928, then, a new Chinese Communist leadership, led by Li Li-san, returned to China to carry out the Comintern's newly formulated strategy of guerrilla war and subversion.

<sup>95</sup> Chang Kuo-t'ao correspondence.

<sup>96</sup> One former Comintern operative saw Li Li-san in 1927 as one of four Chinese Communists who were "looked upon in Moscow as the backbone of the whole revolutionary movement"; see Captain Eugene Pick, *China in the Grip of the Reds*, p. 41.





# Part Two

Execution  
of Policy  
in China



# 3 / The Early Months of the New CCP Leadership

What mandates did Li Li-san bring back to China in the fall of 1928? He was not, as has been shown, instructed to attempt a seizure of state power at this time. Rather, he was directed to pursue a policy of united front from below, symbolized by the slogan "struggle for the masses." The specific content of the new policy (as detailed in Chapter 2) called for action in city and countryside. In the cities, which meant the larger industrial-administrative centers, Li Li-san was directed to increase Communist influence among the workers, especially in the trade-union movement and among the intelligentsia. In the countryside, he was directed to organize the peasantry and to stimulate the guerrilla movement to carry on the struggle against the "ruling classes" in the countryside more effectively. In the Soviet areas Li's task was to implement the agrarian revolution, establish soviet bases, and build-up a Chinese Red Army. All of these broad directives presupposed and required the existence of a unified and highly disciplined party organization.

The command to reorganize and discipline the Communist Party apparatus itself was thus the single most important mandate which Li Li-san brought back to China. The Kuomintang's policy of total opposi-

tion to the CCP after April, 1927, had resulted in the destruction of the party's former organizations and sent most of the membership into hiding. Outside of a few rural soviets like that of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh in the Ching-kang Mountains, formed after the split, and the precarious existence of some urban organizations like that of Hsü Hsien in Kiangsu, there simply were no effectively coordinated Communist Party organizations in China. Hence, the problem of reuniting a party apparatus responsive to direction by the Central Politburo was the most pressing task Li Li-san faced. It was also the most far-reaching. No task—the trade-union movement, activity in the soviet areas, organization of the peasantry—was without its organizational implications. In many ways the task of re-establishing a highly co-ordinated party apparatus was inseparable from that of establishing a purely personal political machine. In the Chinese, as perhaps in all Communist parties, personal loyalties were crucial to effective operation, perhaps even more than formal organizational ties.

Stalin assisted Li Li-san indirectly in the task of establishing a unified party apparatus while Li was still in Moscow. Stalin's assistance lay in determining which party leaders were appointed to the Chinese Communist Party Politburo and in preventing key leaders who were inclined to oppose the new policy from returning to China. Stalin's freedom to determine which leaders would be appointed, however, was limited by his then existing alliance with Bukharin. Of the seven appointed to the CCP Politburo, three were apparently selected by Bukharin and three by Stalin. One—Hsiang Chung-fa, the newly appointed Secretary General—was a compromise candidate agreed upon by both, actually selected because his only qualification was that he had a genuine "worker" background.<sup>1</sup> On the "right" in this grouping were Chang Kuo-t'ao, Ts'ai Ho-shen, and Hsiang Ying, all of whom, according to Chang Kuo-t'ao, supported Bukharin and presumably were chosen by him.<sup>2</sup> The remaining three members of the Politburo—Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Li Li-san, and Chou En-lai—were selected by Stalin. The Chinese leadership appointed to the CCP Politburo appears evenly balanced with one "swing" leader, Hsiang Chung-fa. However, the composition of the group that returned to China was weighted to permit the dominance of

<sup>1</sup> Hsiao Tso-liang, *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930–1934*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence with Chang Kuo-t'ao.



the "left" in general and Li Li-san in particular. Stalin managed this simply by preventing Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and Chang Kuo-t'ao from returning with the others on the grounds that since they "opposed each other in Moscow,"<sup>3</sup> they could not be expected to work effectively together in China. Chang Kuo-t'ao, whose Russian pseudonym was Spiridonov,<sup>4</sup> was the only strong leader among the "right" group. Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai (Strakhov), on the other hand, having embraced the "left-extremist" position, was not a part of the Stalinist faction. Thus, Li's position was strengthened and Stalin lost nothing by preventing Ch'ü from returning to China. Bukharin, however, lost a great deal when Chang Kuo-t'ao was not permitted to return to China, for Chang was the most important man in the "right" leadership group. The members of the Politburo who were allowed to return to China, then, were Li Li-san, Chou En-lai, Hsiang Chung-fa, Ts'ai Ho-shen, and Hsiang Ying.<sup>5</sup>

Immediately upon his return, Li Li-san took steps to emasculate the "right" group still further by sending Hsiang Ying out of the Politburo in Shanghai to work in a local party bureau.<sup>6</sup> This left only Ts'ai Ho-shen of the original three "right" members with Li Li-san and Chou En-lai in the Politburo in Shanghai. Hsiang Chung-fa apparently attempted to play the role of mediator in intra-Politburo disputes, but his influence was minimal.<sup>7</sup> In any issue that might come to a vote in the Politburo, Ts'ai Ho-shen could gain only a standoff and then only if Hsiang Chung-fa voted with him. For all practical purposes Ts'ai exercised no influence on Politburo affairs. He tolerated this situation only a few months before returning to the Soviet Union to act as Comintern representative from China about the time of the Second Plenum in June, 1929.<sup>8</sup> According to Chang Kuo-t'ao, Ts'ai's reason for returning to Moscow was that he "opposed the Li Li-san line."<sup>9</sup> Without assuming

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress, II, 11-12 (speech of Chang Kuo-t'ao); II, 23 (speech of No. 1, a Comrade Den).

<sup>4</sup> *Stenographic Report*, Sixth CCP Congress, II, 44 (speech of Ts'ai Ho-shen).

<sup>5</sup> Chang correspondence.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> "Concise History of Hsiang Chung-fa," appendix in *Chuan pien* (Transformations), I, 333. This "Concise History" is reproduced in Wang Chien-min, *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang shih kao* (Draft History of the CCP), II, 159.

<sup>8</sup> Li's dispute with Ts'ai apparently dated from the publication of an article by the latter in the Russian language publication *Problemy Kitaia*, No. 1, 1929, which the Comintern endorsed and Li condemned. More is said about their conflict in the next chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Chang correspondence.

that there was, in fact, a fully developed “Li Li-san line” at this early date, it does seem clear that Li’s views began to dominate the CCP Politburo around the time of the Second Plenum. Chou En-lai’s position at this point was still ambiguous. More will be said of him later.

*Early Attempts to Unify the CCP*

Li Li-san went vigorously about the task of establishing party discipline, systematically attempting to reassert “Central” control over the largely autonomous Communist Party organizations that had formed again under local leadership after the split with the Kuomintang in 1927. While his efforts were largely successful, Li’s position was never absolutely firm, perhaps because of his methods and because he made little distinction between unifying the party and eliminating his personal opposition, potential or real.

The methods Li Li-san employed to unify the party apparatus under Central control varied from harsh power tactics to sophisticated theoretical arguments. At one extreme was outright assassination of internal opponents by the T’e Wu (Special Affairs) bureau,<sup>10</sup> which was headed by Chou En-lai at this time.<sup>11</sup> Troublesome party members or those who in any way threatened Li’s pre-eminence were assigned to hazardous posts and then betrayed to the KMT (a method termed *chieh tao sha jen* by Li Ang).<sup>12</sup> Li also made use of concepts like the necessity for the “bolshevization” of the party to justify reorganizing a particular unit or even its takeover by a Central “branch” organization.<sup>13</sup>

There is available no record of the number of individual party members who were assassinated by the T’e Wu. If Li Ang is to be believed on this matter, even those who expressed a “difference of opinion” with Li Li-san frequently were thus eliminated.<sup>14</sup> Such harsh methods could be used only against the nameless and innumerable party functionaries; more prominent party members were dealt with in a subtler fashion. For example, Li Ang tells how Li Li-san eliminated two very capable party

<sup>10</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t’ai* (Red Stage), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Chang correspondence.

<sup>12</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t’ai*, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> See the November 11, 1928, Central letter in *Ti liu tz’u ta hui hou chung kuo kung ch’an tang ti cheng chih kung tso* (The Political Work of the CCP after the Sixth Congress), pp. 59–60.

<sup>14</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t’ai*, p. 83.

men, Yün Tai-ying and Teng Chung-hsia.<sup>15</sup> Yün, it seemed, was a first-rate theoretician and top party lecturer who worked mostly in the Communist Youth (CY) organization. He opposed Li's inclination to gamble hard-won Communist gains in the organizational realm for questionable political successes, such as infiltrating KMT unions and then ordering strikes to be carried out. Li probably would have eliminated Yün anyway, because he was a potential contender for Li's own position. Yün's opposition only made the decision easier.

Li appointed Yün as secretary of the East Shanghai (Hutung) area, one of seven districts in the city (the others were Fanan, Huhsi, P'utung, Huchung, Chapei, Wusung). The post was considered especially dangerous since it required a party secretary to expose himself to the ever-watchful Kuomintang by undertaking personal work among the masses. Shortly after arriving at his post, Yün Tai-ying was arrested. The KMT believed that they had apprehended only a minor figure called Wang Hsiao-san (Yün's alias) and sentenced him to a comparatively light three-and-a-half year prison term for antigovernment activities. While Yün was in prison, Li Li-san arranged to have his identity revealed to the KMT, who thereupon executed him.<sup>16</sup> Li Li-san employed the same scheme to rid himself of another critic, Teng Chung-hsia, a former professor at Shanghai University. Teng was also assigned as secretary to the East Shanghai bureau. Shortly thereafter he too was arrested and shot by the Kuomintang.<sup>17</sup>

Individuals like Yün and Teng, with relatively little organizational backing, could be eliminated rather easily. Leaders of autonomous party organizations reluctant to follow strictly the command of the Central were more difficult to deal with. The Kiangsu provincial organization was a case in point. Kiangsu, which was headed by Hsü Hsi-ken at the time,<sup>18</sup> was especially important because a large proportion of the party's urban activities was carried on there. The sprawling metropolitan area of Shanghai, with a population of over three and one-half million people,

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84–91.

<sup>16</sup> At the Eighth Party Congress in 1956, Li Li-san admitted to sending Yün to Hutung in the hopes of thereby disposing of him. *Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, II, 251.

<sup>17</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai*, p. 91. Howard Boorman in *Men and Politics in Modern China* (preliminary proofs), I, 116–19, tells a completely different story about Teng, so different that either Li or Professor Boorman is referring to another person.

<sup>18</sup> *Chuan pien*, I, 57.

came under the jurisdiction of the Kiangsu provincial organization. Shanghai was also the location of the CCP Central. This was perhaps one of the primary reasons for the conflict that quickly developed between Li Li-san and Hsü Hsi-ken. From Li Li-san's point of view it was imperative that the Kiangsu provincial organization be highly responsive to Central direction.

On returning to China, Li Li-san convened a joint conference of the Kiangsu provincial committee and Central Politburo. After some discussion it was agreed that the Central would lay down certain general directives by which the provincial organization would function, but that the Central itself would not attempt to direct the work of the Kiangsu organization.<sup>19</sup> The Central established two "inspection committees" (*hsün shih wei yüan hui*) to review the Kiangsu party's organization and the situation in the trade unions.<sup>20</sup> It was also agreed to enlarge the provincial committee, presumably with candidates chosen jointly by both Hsü and Li. While the Central had agreed not to "direct the work" of the Kiangsu organization, Li's moves were, in fact, designed to bring Hsü's organization under tighter Central control.

On the face of it, Hsü had no alternative but to accept these arrangements, coming as they did from the Central Committee of the CCP. But Hsü opposed Li's attempts to gain control of the Kiangsu organization, first secretly—then openly, and the struggle developed during the weeks that followed. Hsü had built a solid organization in Kiangsu that enabled him to withstand Li Li-san's maneuver of packing the provincial committee. Unable to gain control of the Kiangsu organization by this means, Li adopted a different tactic. He sent out a letter to all comrades (*kao t'ung chih shu*).<sup>21</sup> The first part of the letter was a concise restatement of the policies adopted by the Sixth Congress of the CCP. Beyond this, however, it was a catalogue of wrongs that persisted in the party and which must be eliminated. In addition to the usual warnings about the danger of opportunism, putschism, commandism, and so forth, the letter cited other dangerous tendencies, which also had to be eliminated. These were demands for extreme democratization, personal

<sup>19</sup> "An Opinion on the Central's work," January 20, 1929, pp. 159-72; "A Reply to the Kiangsu Committee's 'Opinion on the Central's Work,'" Feb. 1929, pp. 133-58; both from *Ti liu tz'u ta hui hou . . .* (The Political Work of the CCP . . .).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, see the November 11, 1928, letter from the Central, pp. 47-69.



attacks on party members, and development of cliques, all of which "hindered our present general task of winning over the masses."<sup>22</sup> These "dangerous tendencies" could be powerful weapons for Li Li-san. They could provide the justification for almost any action he desired to take against organizations that opposed the Central Politburo, including the Kiangsu organization.

Whether or not the November letter to all comrades really was designed to justify a stepped-up onslaught on Hsü Hsi-ken's organization, Li Li-san shortly called a plenum of the Kiangsu provincial leadership. At the plenum he is reported to have said: "Now, in all aspects the Kiangsu committee has had great accomplishments, but these are still not enough. So that the Central can strengthen the provincial leadership, the provincial committee must be reorganized."<sup>23</sup> Li had been unable to gain control over the Kiangsu organization by packing its leadership with his own men; now he threatened to reorganize and thus eliminate those who opposed him. Li Li-san could justify his action on the grounds, stated in the November letter, that he was eliminating an anti-Central clique and further bolshevizing the party!

Hsü Hsi-ken and the rest of the provincial committee immediately opposed Li Li-san.<sup>24</sup> In a letter to the Central they protested against the reorganization, the takeover, that is, of their organization by the Central Politburo. To make their protest more effective, they countered with accusations about the shortcomings of the new party leadership.<sup>25</sup> The struggle was now in the open. The Kiangsu leadership probably hoped that general protest by party members would force Li Li-san to reconsider his plan. Hsü and his comrades emphasized in their letter that (1) the Central had provided poor leadership; (2) it was not following the policies set forth at the Sixth Congress; and (3) the Kiangsu committee could not agree to Li's proposal for its reorganization, which would mean the removal of the incumbent leadership.

The Kiangsu provincial committee's letter stressed that over the past few months (September, 1928–January, 1929) the Li Li-san leadership had exhibited serious shortcomings: an inability to analyze events "deeply" and, as good Marxists, to predict political events from eco-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Chuan pien*, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ti liu tz'u ta hui hou* . . . , pp. 159–72.



conomic trends.<sup>26</sup> These were the reasons, the letter said, that the Central had been often taken by surprise of late. Its analyses of situations had been made only after the events. Moreover, the Kiangsu committee pointed out, the Central's analysis of the present period of the revolution conflicted with that of the political resolution of the Sixth Congress. This was a serious charge. If substantiated, it could well have spelled the early demise of the newly formed Central leadership. The Kiangsu committee quoted the political resolution of the Sixth Congress on the estimate of the present period: ". . . because of successive defeats, the first revolutionary tide has passed and the new tide has not yet arrived." Then it compared this with an excerpt from the Central's circular No. 2, "The Spirit and Conclusions of the Sixth Congress," which purportedly summarized the resolutions adopted at the Sixth Congress. The excerpt stated that the present was the "period when the old revolutionary high tide has already passed, and the new revolutionary high tide quickly will arrive [*k'uai yao tao lai*]."<sup>27</sup> The Kiangsu leadership considered this an "overestimation" of the present situation and challenged the Central to explain it.

The letter continued, elaborating on the general theme of a difference between the Central's policies and the policies adopted at the Sixth Congress. The Sixth Congress had wanted to emphasize work in the peasant movement, the Kiangsu leadership contended; hence it had "carefully passed resolutions on the peasant movement and the agrarian question." But, the letter charged, since the Central had returned to China, outside of one circular regarding the Autumn Harvest struggle, "there have been no other circulars and instructions on the peasant movement," nor were there any articles on the peasant movement in the Central's publications.<sup>28</sup> For the past few months, the Central

. . . has caused the provincial comrades to concentrate only on urban work and the workers' movement and to ignore the peasant movement. We think that the Central should emphasize key work areas [*chung hsin kung tso ch'ü yü*] around the country, not only areas where industrial workers are concentrated, but key peasant work areas as well. Only in this way can the workers' and peasants' movements develop equally.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

The Kiangsu committee's charge was not without substance. In directive after directive during the latter part of 1928 and early 1929 the Li Li-san leadership had stressed the necessity to concentrate on urban activities.<sup>30</sup>

To these charges the Kiangsu leadership added others. They reeled off, apparently at random, reasons for opposing the proposed reorganization. The Central had neglected the anti-imperialist movement and military work. The Central had gone back on its pledge to abstain from direct interference in Kiangsu's affairs. The Central's prime concern, the Kiangsu leadership thought, should be national affairs, not provincial affairs. They contended that reorganization of the provincial committee would be a violation of the party's organizational principles.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps hoping to frighten Li Li-san into inaction, the Kiangsu leadership then said that if the Central reorganized the Kiangsu committee it would bring its activities to the attention of Kuomintang authorities, who, even now, were "beginning to gather their forces to destroy the Shanghai organization, concentrating especially on the Central's organization."<sup>32</sup> There was little logical relation among the last few charges of the Kiangsu leadership, but this may be explained at least in part by the fact that they were undoubtedly alarmed at the prospect of being ousted from their posts.

In the last section of the letter the Kiangsu leadership played what it hoped was its trump card—that any reorganization of the Kiangsu provincial committee must be done at a conference of provincial representatives. Therefore, the letter concluded, the Central Politburo could organize only a temporary standing committee until a conference was held.<sup>33</sup> This final assertion by the Kiangsu committee implied that the authority of the Central Politburo of the CCP was second to that of a provincial assembly, and that the Central's actions must be sanctioned by such an assembly. Thus ended the Kiangsu letter of protest. It served notice that the Kiangsu leadership would not submit voluntarily to its own dismissal and was a severe counterindictment of the top CCP leadership that could not be left unanswered.

<sup>30</sup> *Ti liu tz'u ta hui hou . . .*, Central circulars for the months September through December, 1928.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168–69.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170–71.

Early in February, 1929, the Central replied. It denied committing the errors of which it was charged "in principle," while admitting that a few minor mistakes undoubtedly had been made. Some mistakes, however, were inevitable under any leadership. To the charge that its analysis was not deep the Central replied that this was a "muddled criticism." The relevant criterion was not "depth" but actual content.<sup>34</sup> The Kiangsu committee, said the Central, asserted that Central could not predict political events from economic trends, that it could not predict the future. This was true, Central acknowledged. "We can only point to the direction of political developments, we cannot predict every political event and every mass struggle."<sup>35</sup>

The Central was forced to admit the validity of the charge that there had been a discrepancy between their estimate of the present period of the revolution and that of the Sixth Congress, but claimed that it had been unintended. The term "quickly will arrive" [*k'uai yao tao lai*] conceded the Central, "definitely is a writing error."<sup>36</sup> It should have read "the new revolutionary high tide 'unavoidably will arrive' " [*pu k'e pi mien tao lai*], the formula sanctioned by the Sixth Congress. In fact, said the Central, this is the phrasing that was used in all Central circulars, and they acknowledged their mistake in this case. However, "the Central opposes this kind of analysis," referring to that used by the Kiangsu leadership.<sup>37</sup> The use of the term "quickly will arrive" proved to have been a mistake, but Li Li-san's use of it on other occasions, including one other important circular,<sup>38</sup> would indicate that the mistake was one of judgment, not inadvertence.

It was significant that at this early date, only four months after Li Li-san had returned to China as leader of the party, the Kiangsu leadership had detected a difference between the estimates of the present revolutionary situation made by the Sixth Congress and that made by the Central. The concept of the estimate of the revolution, or as it was alternatively referred to, the speed of development of the revolution, was extremely important. Differences in terminology implied more than mere verbal differences. In the examples cited, the use of the term "unavoida-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> See "The Present Revolutionary Situation and the Party's Strategy and Tactics" (Sept. 18, 1929), in *Ti liu tz'u ta hui hou* . . . , pp. 19-20.

bly will arrive" carried the connotation that the revolutionary tide was developing toward a high tide, but implied nothing about the proximity of such a high tide. On the other hand, the term "quickly will arrive" connoted that a revolutionary high tide was close at hand, implying that the signal for widespread revolutionary uprisings would be given in the very near future. The alert Kiangsu leadership noticed this difference in terminology employed by the Li Li-san leadership and demanded an explanation.

Continuing in reply to the Kiangsu letter of protest, the Central next took up the charge that it had ignored the peasant movement, and maintained that this was untrue. It referred to the circular ("The Spirit and Conclusions of the CCP Sixth Congress") cited by the Kiangsu leadership in its letter, to the *Chung yang kao ch'üan t'i t'ung chih shu* (Central Letter to All Comrades), and to "other" circulars (which, however, were not specifically cited) as proof that the Central leadership did indeed recognize the importance of the peasant movement. The refutation was unconvincing and tangential. Central asserted that it had not ignored the *importance* of the peasant movement, but could not deny that, in fact, it had placed greater emphasis on urban rather than rural activities in opposition to the Sixth Congress' directives, which was the charge that the Kiangsu leadership had made.<sup>39</sup> The Central also categorically denied that it had ignored the anti-imperialist movement and work in military affairs, although it did admit that it had "not fully concentrated on" the military issue in practice.<sup>40</sup> But in principle, reaffirmed the Central, it had ignored nothing.

Disregarding most of the Kiangsu leadership's listing of reasons why the provincial committee should not be reorganized, the Central made some charges of its own. It accused the Kiangsu leadership of spreading "anti-Central propaganda among the comrades," of having made much nonfactual propaganda about the "creation of a Central faction." The Central stated ominously that "the provincial committee could not have made a greater political mistake."<sup>41</sup> Answering to the Kiangsu committee's contention that a provincial conference must be called before the

<sup>39</sup> Schwartz observes that emphasis on urban over rural work is evident in "almost every circular issued by the party until the Second Plenum of the Central Committee of June 1929," *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 129.

<sup>40</sup> *Ti liu tz'u ta hui hou . . .*, p. 154.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.



provincial committee could be reorganized, the Central said that its prerogative was not dependent on the decisions of a provincial assembly. Demand for a provincial conference was termed a "contrived, legalistic point of view."<sup>42</sup> If circumstances warranted, asserted the Central, a reorganization could be carried out which in no way would be provisional. The Central concluded its letter by saying exactly what Hsü Hsi-ken and the rest of the Kiangsu committee had feared; that they could not "wait for a conference of representatives, therefore we have decided to reorganize the provincial committee now."<sup>43</sup>

Even after receiving this letter, Hsü Hsi-ken and the Kiangsu leadership attempted to organize a last-ditch defense of their positions, but with their geographical proximity to the Central, their chances of successful resistance were slim. When Li Li-san realized that the Kiangsu group would not relinquish its positions upon his orders, he dispatched a "Central branch" to Kiangsu headquarters.<sup>44</sup> Although this move was also vehemently opposed by the Kiangsu group, there was little that they could do; Li Li-san had simply set up a separate organization under his own command that took over the functions of the Kiangsu provincial organization. Contributing to his misfortune, a few members of Hsü's own group, including K'ang Sheng, defected, and thereafter all overt resistance to Li Li-san collapsed.<sup>45</sup> Hsü Hsi-ken and those who had remained loyal to him were removed from their leadership positions. According to Hsü's later account, however, he and his followers "secretly" continued to work against Li Li-san over the next two years and were quick to oppose him once more in 1930 when Li's plans failed.<sup>46</sup> Thus, while Li Li-san had successfully brought the Kiangsu provincial organization under his control, there remained a kernel of opposition within the Kiangsu Party organization that would await an opportunity to unseat him.

### *Initial Experience with the Soviet Areas*

It was relatively easy for Li Li-san to secure control of groups like the Kiangsu organization if they lay close to the center of power and were, like the Central, without any significant military force at their disposal.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Chuan pien*, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



## 75/ Early Months of the New CCP Leadership

Li's attempt to "unify" the soviet areas under Central command was complicated by the existence of these very two factors: distance and the existence of a military force. The soviet areas were far from the Shanghai-located Central Politburo—hundreds of miles away in some cases—and each soviet had built up or was in the process of building up its own military force in consonance with the Comintern's dictum to build a Red Army.

About nine months passed between the failure of the insurrection at Canton in December, 1927, and the return of the new party leadership from Moscow. During that time several small enclaves of Communists (they called their camps "soviets") had arisen. Of major concern in this context is the one led by Mao Tse-tung, located in the Ching-kang mountains in the Lo Hsiao mountain range between Hunan and Kiangsi, but there were others already in existence at this time. In western Hupeh a small soviet had grown up under the leadership of the former Kuomintang army officer Ho Lung. In eastern Hupeh a similar group, later known as the Oyüwan Soviet, had formed under Hsü Hai-tung and others. Along the northeast frontier of Kiangsi, adjacent to Fukien, a soviet had sprung up under Fang Chih-min; in the Kian area in central Kiangsi another small soviet, which later became known as the Central Soviet government, had formed under the leadership of Communists Li Wen-lung and Li Sao-chu.<sup>47</sup> In the chaos that followed the split with the Kuomintang, these groups had formed independently, without relation to each other and without planned direction by the party's Central leadership. Since what strength the party had at this time lay in the rural areas, the soviets, there could be no thought of unified party organization so long as the various soviet areas remained outside Central control and direction.<sup>48</sup>

Li Li-san, of course, was acutely aware of the need to assert his authority. The situation of the party in 1928 was far different from that which prevailed during the period of collaboration with the Kuomintang. Then, the party had no independent force; its strength was in its ability to mobilize and organize the urban and rural masses in demonstrations,

<sup>47</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*, pp. 171–72.

<sup>48</sup> Those who argue that Mao Tse-tung independently developed the strategy of guerrilla warfare or "people's war" must explain how it was that other Communists in the Chinese countryside were carrying out a strategy identical to Mao's, at a time when he could in no way be considered the leader of the Chinese Communist movement. This alone suggests a strategy imparted from outside.

strikes, and so forth, and the locus of power lay with those who controlled these activities—the Central Committee. Now, while the party was still engaged in the work of mobilizing and organizing the masses, it was also concerned with establishing and building its own armed force, a Red Army.

It is no surprise, then, to find Li Li-san attempting to establish his authority over Mao Tse-tung just as he did over Hsü Hsi-ken. This was after all, strictly in accordance with the mandate to unify the party. The inspection committees set up in Kiangsu were also established in the Ching-kang mountains.<sup>49</sup> In the fall of 1928, about the time that Li Li-san was engaged in the struggle to take over the Kiangsu provincial organization, he sent a directive to Mao Tse-tung ordering him to reorganize his newly formed “army” into guerrilla units and disperse them over a wide area.<sup>50</sup> Li may have done this in good faith, believing that the concentrated build-up of a Red Army at that time would provide too tempting a target for Nationalist forces. If so, Li’s good faith was in direct contradiction to the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the CCP, which called expressly for the build-up of a Chinese Red Army as well as the development of guerrilla warfare.

It is likely that military tactics—whether to emphasize guerrilla warfare or the build-up of a formal Red Army—were not the issue, it was simply that Mao’s position in the countryside constituted a potential threat to Li Li-san. Li’s directive—incomprehensible as it seems from the point of view of the Communist movement as a whole as well as from the resolutions of the Sixth CCP Congress—was designed to weaken Mao’s position by scattering his forces over the countryside and to prevent the consolidation of his base area. In his reply of November, 1928, Mao Tse-tung respectfully declined to follow Li’s order. He explained that “the principle for the Red Army is concentration” not dispersion, and then excused the Central’s order on the grounds that it was “probably due to an overestimation of our strength.”<sup>51</sup>

In February, 1929, Li Li-san sent another directive to Mao Tse-tung, who had just become party chairman of a Front Committee in command of a force, according to his own estimate, of “more than 10,000 men.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Mao Tse-tung hsüan-chi* (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung) (hereafter cited as *Mao SW*), p. 542, quoted in Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 179.

<sup>50</sup> *Mao SW*, I, 69.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Snow, *Red Star Over China*, p. 177.

Chiang Kai-shek's attempt to stamp out the burgeoning "bandit" forces in the Lo Hsiao mountains in the interim between the two directives indicated the rapidly growing strength of Mao's forces. It also provided a convenient pretext for Li Li-san to repeat his earlier order to Mao to cease building up a Red Army.<sup>53</sup> Li again instructed Mao Tse-tung to organize the Red Army into guerrilla units and to "disperse them over the countryside."<sup>54</sup> Now, however, Li wanted something more than the mere dispersal of Mao's forces. He ordered both Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh to withdraw from command of the Red Army (!), presumably to Central headquarters in Shanghai.<sup>55</sup>

Mao did not reply to Li's directive until a month later, on April 5. For the second time he refused to accept the order of the Central Politburo, this time peremptorily. He asserted that the orders to disperse the Red Army and for him and Chu Teh to withdraw from it were "unrealistic."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he said that "the Central Committee's February letter was not in the right spirit and had a bad effect on a number of party comrades in the Fourth Army."<sup>57</sup> Hinting at the real issue that lay behind the orders, Mao blandly assured Li Li-san that it was "wrong for any of our party members to fear the growth of peasant strength lest it should outstrip the workers' strength."<sup>58</sup>

What Mao Tse-tung was saying, of course, was that it was wrong for the Central (Li Li-san) to fear an increase in his (Mao's) strength. As Li understood and as later events were to prove, an increase in Mao Tse-tung's strength vis-à-vis his own was precisely what was to be feared most. The gradual shifting of the balance of power away from the Central toward the soviet base areas and their military forces was a factor that Li Li-san could not ignore. Indeed, the ultimate motivation of the "Li Li-san line" may well have been an attempt to counter the shift of power away from Li Li-san and the Central in Shanghai.

Mao Tse-tung's opinion of the forces in play during this period tends to confirm this hypothesis. Referring to the situation in his account to the American journalist, Edgar Snow, Mao said:

<sup>53</sup> *Mao SW*, I, 106.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The tendencies [toward excessive militarism, vagabondism, and partisanism] were very serious, and were utilized by a Trotskyist faction in the Party and military leadership to undermine the strength of the [Soviet] movement. A vigorous struggle was now begun against them, and several were deprived of their Party positions and army command. . . . It was found out that they intended to destroy the Red Army by leading it into difficult positions in battles with the enemy.<sup>59</sup>

There can be little doubt that the “Red Army” refers to Mao himself and his followers, while the “they” refers to the Central, that is, to the Li Li-san leadership.<sup>60</sup> Later, at his Moscow trial, Li Li-san was accused, among other charges, of being a “Trotskyite.”<sup>61</sup>

Li Li-san's early relations with Mao Tse-tung present something of a paradox. The Comintern, in its resolutions, directed Li Li-san to reorganize the party under “Central” discipline, and also called upon him to support the establishment of soviet bases in the countryside and to build a Chinese Red Army. The expansion of guerrilla warfare was also a part of that directive. The paradox is that during this time both Li Li-san and Mao Tse-tung simultaneously followed the Comintern's directives and contravened them. Li Li-san strove to establish his authority over the soviet movement, according to Comintern directives, but in so doing he attempted to prevent the consolidation and expansion of the soviet base areas by ordering Mao to concentrate on dispersed small-unit guerrilla warfare. Mao Tse-tung followed Comintern directives to the extent that he engaged in the establishment and expansion of soviet base areas but also flatly contravened these directives when he resisted Li Li-san's attempts to establish Central control over the soviet movement and its armed forces.

Here showed the first faint glimmerings of the dilemma that Li Li-san faced in 1930 and from which he tried to extricate himself by his “line.” Li's power base lay in the urban organizations of the party; he had no

<sup>59</sup> Snow, *Red Star Over China*, p. 174; see also Mao Dze-tun, *Biograficheskii ocherk* (A Biographical Essay on Mao Tse-tung) p. 46. The book is a very close paraphrase of Snow's *Red Star Over China*.

<sup>60</sup> Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , pp. 178–83, presents a concise and even incisive treatment of the conflict between Mao and the Central without, however, attempting to relate it to the Li Li-san line. See also John Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition*, chap. vi.

<sup>61</sup> “Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t'ao lun” (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san line), *Pu-erh-se-wei-k'e* (Bolshevik), IV, No. 3 (May 10, 1931), 8.



military force directly under his command. Ostensibly Li Li-san ruled the party and all of its forces, but in fact he had no effective control over distant soviet base areas and their armed forces. At any rate, he did not control the forces of Mao Tse-tung. Mao, on the other hand, possessed a military force and party organization literally and figuratively far removed from Central authority in Shanghai. Under the conditions of the Kuomintang "white terror" in the cities, which became more effective as the Nationalists consolidated their regime, no great insight was required to see that a gradual shift of power was taking place in the party and that the possessor of an independent military force eventually would be in a position to direct the fortunes of the Chinese Communist movement.

As long as soviet base areas with their armed forces lay outside Li's control, any increase in their strength endangered his own position. Yet the Comintern urged Li to support the soviet areas. If he carried out the Comintern's directives he would enhance the strength of the Red Army leaders (primarily Mao and Chu), bringing dangerously near the day when real power would lie with the Red Army leaders, and he would become at best a figurehead. If he disregarded Comintern directives concerning the build-up of a Red Army, Li's position as leader of the CCP would soon be jeopardized from above—he might be dismissed by Moscow. These were the horns of Li's dilemma. If he supported the build-up of a Red Army, power would likely slip from his grasp; if he disregarded the Comintern's directives (and were discovered) he would certainly be removed from the leadership.

The policy that Li Li-san appears to have adopted in early 1929 was to attempt to undermine the growing power of the soviet movement and its leadership while strengthening his own position in the party's urban organizations. This helps to explain his orders to scatter guerrilla units over the countryside and his orders to Mao and Chu to withdraw from the Red Army command. It helps to explain his efforts to prevent a concentration of forces into a Red Army and his attempts to take over the party's urban organizations, such as that in Kiangsu. Li Ang may have been attempting to suggest this kind of situation when he later explained the Li Li-san line in terms of a struggle for single leadership of the Chinese Communist movement. "Li Li-san represented the urban petty bourgeoisie and Mao Tse-tung represented the rural petty bour-



geoisie . . . Li Li-san's vision was turned fixedly toward the cities, while Mao Tse-tung wanted to bury himself in the countryside."<sup>62</sup>

The danger in Li's policy was that it flatly contradicted the directives of the Comintern despite his persistent efforts to define them as identical. Moscow had no vested interest in preserving the leading position of the party for Li Li-san; its primary purpose was to build up a political-military force in China that would function as an instrument serving Moscow's own ends. Li's policy of undermining the soviet movement could not have been looked upon with favor by Moscow, and the inevitability of discovery by the Comintern was a constant constraint that undoubtedly affected Li's plans. Once the Comintern learned what he was up to, Li Li-san would have at best only a few months of unhampered action. At this point, however, Li's plans—if clearly formulated—were scarcely in an incipient stage.

<sup>62</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai*, p. 92.

# 4 / Elaboration of Comintern Policy

During 1929, in February, June, and October, the Comintern sent major directives to the CCP leadership, elaborating on and giving definitive shape to the policy adopted the previous year. The Comintern communicated with the CCP leadership in other ways—orally, through Chinese traveling between Moscow and Shanghai, and by telegram—but these three letters were the only formal policy directives sent by the Comintern in 1929.<sup>1</sup> The letter of February 7 concerned the party's urban policy, especially its activities in the trade unions, and also rectified some mistaken theoretical concepts. The second letter, that of June 7, related to the party's policy toward the peasantry, especially the rich peasantry. It was intertwined with the political struggle then nearing its climax among the top leadership in the Soviet Union. The third letter,

<sup>1</sup> "Lun kuo min tang kai tsu p'ai ho chung kuo kung ch'an tang ti jen wu" (A Discussion of the Kuomintang Reorganizationists and the Tasks of the CCP), dated Oct. 26, 1929, *Hung-ch'i* (Red Flag) Feb. 15, 1930, No. 76, p. 2. In its October letter the Comintern stated, "supplementary to our preceding letters (on the peasant [June 7] and trade union [February 7] questions), we find it necessary to call your attention to the following basic tasks . . .," p. 2 (hereafter cited as *CI Letter of Oct. 26, 1929*). For a discussion of the question of radio contact between Moscow and Shanghai, see chap. viii.

of October 26, related to the broader issue of the international crisis over the Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria.

*Early Relations with the Comintern*

The Comintern's first formal communication to the new CCP leadership came on February 7, 1929.<sup>2</sup> It betrayed no awareness of the dilemma that was slowly forcing itself upon Li Li-san. The directive reviewed recent past policy and provided a guideline for current and short-run policy. Three issues were discussed in it: The estimate of the current revolutionary situation; urban policy, especially trade-union policy; and the question of party organization. The peasant question was reserved for discussion at a later date.

The Comintern first reviewed the policies that the Central had pursued since the return of the newly appointed leadership to China. It raised the issue of the speed at which a new revolutionary high tide might develop, and about which, it felt, party documents seemed to reflect some misunderstanding.<sup>3</sup> (The exchange between Li Li-san and Hsü Hsi-ken undoubtedly contributed to Comintern uneasiness on this issue.) The misunderstanding concerned the estimate of the moment when the Chinese Communists might make another attempt to overthrow the Nationalist government. The letter quoted the resolution of the Sixth Congress of the CCP, and stated: "we can see the earliest, weakest signs of a new high tide," but ". . . we must not overestimate these signs because even combined they still cannot form a genuine high tide."<sup>4</sup>

Some comrades, the letter continued, believed that a new high tide would arrive in the "very near future [*tuan ti ch'ien t'u*]; this can be

<sup>2</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih hsing wei yüan hui yü chung kuo kung ch'an tang shu" (Letter of the ECCI to the CCP) regarding the trade-union question, Feb. 7, 1929, *Hung-se wen-hsien* (Red Documents), pp. 297–319 (hereafter cited as "ECCI Letter to CCP regarding Trade-Union Question"). See also Pavel Mif (ed.), *Strategiia i taktika Komintern v natsionalno-kolonialnoi revoliutsii na primere Kitaia* (Strategy and Tactics of the Comintern in the National-Colonial Revolution, e.g., China), pp. 223–44.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Conrad Brandt, Benjamin I. Schwartz, and John Fairbank, *Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, p. 165, where, in discussing the Second Plenum of July, 1929, it is argued that "it was only after the CCP leadership's tactical errors had become glaringly apparent [in the summer of 1930] that its theoretical errors were given close attention [by the Comintern]." Emphasis supplied.

<sup>4</sup> "ECCI Letter to CCP regarding Trade-Union Question," *Hung-se wen-hsien*, p. 304.

termed revolutionary idiocy." It was apparent from the Central's circulars, commented the letter, that this view had not been entirely overcome. Circular No. 65, for example, had stated that "the bourgeoisie is preparing to wage war against the Kwangsi group, thus the reactionary government will even more quickly move on to the road of complete shakiness and collapse." This, said the Comintern, was certainly an overestimation. It could not be said, at least for the next half-year, that the Kuomintang government would be "very shaky." Prediction of revolutionary possibilities must be done cautiously. "We must recognize that the maturation of a new revolutionary upsurge proceeds very slowly."<sup>5</sup> The Comintern upheld the conclusion of the Sixth Congress that the faint beginnings of a new revolutionary upsurge were visible, but emphasized that, "even combined," such faint stirrings were insufficient to warrant the change to a policy of large-scale revolutionary action. It criticized those who implied that direct action could soon be taken against even a "shaky" Nationalist regime. The Comintern maintained this position consistently throughout the entire period under study.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, continued the Comintern, the comrades who believed that the new revolutionary upsurge would be "delayed for a long period" were also incorrect. Of course, theoretically, ". . . the possibility that a direct revolutionary situation (or a situation of direct armed uprising) can be delayed for several years," could not be denied but this assumed a long period of peaceful development for the Nationalist regime and "is a very great mistake."<sup>7</sup> The Comintern hedged. While implying that there was no immediate possibility of a direct revolutionary situation, it asserted that one would develop at some point in the future. Such revolutionary positivism was necessary to distinguish its analysis from that of Trotsky, who had earlier held that the situation in China was not revolutionary but counterrevolutionary, transforming itself into an "inter-revolutionary period of indefinite duration."<sup>8</sup>

Urban policy, the second issue discussed, followed directly from the position that no "direct revolutionary situation" was possible in the "very near future." "The first task of the Chinese Party is to strengthen

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> See chap. viii.

<sup>7</sup> "ECCI Letter to CCP regarding Trade-Union Question," *Hung-se wen-hsien*, p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 110.

secret party work." The second was "to reveal the false face of KMT policies, to agitate the masses to oppose them, and to prepare the masses for the overthrow of KMT rule." The third must be the "elimination of the party's separation from the masses." There could be no substitute for mass support; the party must win over the masses.<sup>9</sup>

A misunderstanding of these tasks and an infatuation with 'left' infantilism . . . amounts directly to sabotage. Outwardly, the Chinese comrades completely and correctly accept the resolutions of the Sixth CCP Congress and Sixth CI Congress regarding [the policy of] winning over the masses, but in fact not all of the party members conscientiously carry them out. The most important reason for this is the 'left' danger, which the party must unconditionally and completely eliminate.<sup>10</sup>

In the Comintern's view the prerequisite for revolutionary success was the support of the masses. It was suggesting that the "Chinese comrades" were ignoring this basic task in favor of reckless revolutionary activity, which they termed the "left" danger and "left" infantilism.

The penultimate section of the directive was devoted to trade-union activities. After the ritual reminder that the party could not command the leading position in the Chinese revolution without a firm base among the workers, the Comintern took stock of the actual situation. It was forced to admit that the party's influence in the unions and among workers in general had decreased substantially since the debacle of 1927, while the influence of the Kuomintang had increased. Under such conditions it conceded that open, legal activity was virtually impossible, and that the party must employ semilegal, covert methods to regain its influence. Front organizations, such as associations of fellow provincials (*t'ung hsiang hui*) and brotherhood societies (*hsiung ti t'uan*), must be set up to serve as cover for the outlawed and persecuted Red unions. Finally, party members must penetrate the Yellow (KMT) unions to build up a position there.<sup>11</sup> These policy recommendations for the party's trade-union activities followed directly from the three main tasks that the Comintern conceived for the CCP in the cities, namely, "to strengthen secret party work," "agitate the masses," and "to eliminate the party's separation from the masses."

<sup>9</sup> "ECCI Letter to CCP regarding Trade-Union Question," *Hung-se wen-hsien*, p. 309.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15.



In the last few pages of the February letter, the Comintern dealt extensively with the state of the party's urban organization, which "cannot be said to be satisfactory."<sup>12</sup> For example,

Central circular number 69 says: 'most of the urban cells are scattered, many workers positively cannot locate the party. Because of this they are continuously leaving our organizations. The majority of the party's active elements cannot find work, have lost contact with the masses, and depend on the party for a livelihood.' According to the Politburo's reports, the party's urban members at most do not exceed 4,000 (among these are 1,300 in Shanghai, 600 in Hong Kong, and many fewer in other large cities), and in the majority of the cities, even among the largest workers' centers, such as Wuhan, Tientsin, and Canton, there is no work at all.<sup>13</sup>

As the party had repeatedly urged in its circulars, the letter continued, the party's position in the cities must be strengthened. The crucial thing at this time was "to put into practice some of the suggestions that the Central has made."<sup>14</sup> The over-all impression conveyed by the letter was one of dissatisfaction with the party leadership: organizational shortcomings in the party's trade-union activities and in its own urban party organizations; theoretical errors regarding the basic concept of the estimation of the current revolutionary situation and its speed of development.

Pavel Mif, writing in *Communist International* a short time later, was even more uncompromising. Closely following the line of thought contained in the February letter, but much less conciliatory, Mif also stressed the Chinese Party's organizational and theoretical weaknesses.

Notwithstanding the achievement of partial successes, the Chinese Party by far has not yet succeeded in overcoming its difficulties. In a very great measure, up to the present it has been adversely affected by the atomization, disorganization, and disconnectedness of its rank and file. The party has far from overcome the severe weakening of its organizational ties that resulted from the savage reaction and frenzied terror [of the KMT].<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Pavel Mif, "Blizaishie zadachi Kitaiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii" (Immediate Tasks of the CCP), *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 11 (1929), p. 11.

On the critical theoretical issue of the speed of development of the revolution, Mif clearly implied that the new "high tide" of the Chinese revolution was still far in the future.

Even if a more or less prolonged interval between two waves is assumed, even if the possibility of a relatively protracted delay is considered, even then the intervening period will not be one of the peaceful and tranquil economic and political development of China.<sup>16</sup>

As in the Comintern's letter, Mif drew the conclusion regarding current policy that was implied in the theoretical analysis—warning that no immediate action could be taken. "Individual Communists, displaying a revolutionary impatience, are patterning their actions on [the assumption of] a too-rapid growth of the new upsurge of the revolution, overestimating their own forces and the depth of decay of the counter-revolutionary camp."<sup>17</sup>

It is not clear whether, by "individual Communists," Mif was referring to Li Li-san or to Mao Tse-tung. Either one could have been accused of "revolutionary impatience" at this point. Mao Tse-tung had suggested to the Central a plan to bring the entire province of Kiangsi under Communist control within one year, that is, by early 1930. Mao's plan, however, was fully within the limits prescribed by the Comintern's "victory in one or several provinces" formula set forth at the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928. Li Li-san, on the other hand, had attempted to inject into the jargon of Central circulars the idea that the revolutionary high tide "quickly would arrive," which the Comintern resolutely opposed in its February letter. Li's motive for gaining acceptance of this change in terminology would not become clear until much later, when he based his "line" upon the *existence* of a "revolutionary high tide."<sup>18</sup> There are two important points to be made about both the Comintern letter and the Mif article. First, that the ECCI already had misgivings about the manner in which the new leadership was directing party affairs a scant four months after assuming office, and second, that these misgivings centered on the party's apparent "revolutionary impatience."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> See chaps. vii and viii.

*Changing Comintern Policy Toward the Peasantry*

On June 7, 1929, the Comintern sent a second directive to the CCP Politburo calling for a change in policy toward the rich peasantry, from nonantagonism to complete opposition.<sup>19</sup> The application of Soviet policy in China by the Li Li-san leadership, combined with the culmination of a power struggle in the Soviet Union, apparently led to the change. At the Sixth Congress the year before, the view taken was that the rich peasantry as a class was differentiable into "reactionary" and "progressive" elements. The former were to be opposed, the latter supported; it was considered unnecessary to antagonize the rich peasant needlessly at the time.

The policy of nonantagonism toward the rich peasant, or kulak, was the result of a compromise—clear in intent but not in formulation—between Stalin and Bukharin over the general issue of policy toward the Chinese bourgeoisie. The compromise was the price each paid for a coalition against the "extreme-left" group that unsuccessfully challenged their policies at the Sixth Congress.<sup>20</sup> By mid-1929, Stalin had turned against and defeated Bukharin, and had taken over effective command of the State and Comintern apparatus. It was no longer necessary for him to honor the agreement made with Bukharin.

A second factor accounting for the change in Comintern policy was precisely the fact that the original statement had been ambiguously formulated. As soon as Li Li-san returned to China in 1928, he turned this ambiguity to his advantage in the struggle to gain control of the Soviet movement, even though his interpretation of policy toward the rich peasantry was clearly inconsistent with the main thrust of the Comintern's rural policy. As early as September 17 the new leadership urged the leaders of the Soviet areas "to unite with the petty bourgeoisie and rich peasants to oppose all reactionary forces."<sup>21</sup> Later, Li Li-san instructed Mao Tse-tung to "ally" with the rich peasantry. In a letter to him, Li said that the party in the countryside "should unite with the rich

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , pp. 133–35, who omits all mention of the Comintern's June 7, 1929, letter.

<sup>20</sup> See chap. i.

<sup>21</sup> *Chung yang t'ung hsin ti erh hao* (Central Circular No. 2), "The Spirit and Conclusions of the CCP Sixth Congress," Sept. 17, 1928, p. 7 (emphasis added).

peasantry, because to increase the struggle against the rich peasant is incorrect. . . ."<sup>22</sup> The logic is Li Li-san's. Again, Li affirmed that "our general tactical line demands an alliance with the rich peasantry."<sup>23</sup> The interpretation clearly stretched both letter and intent of the stated policy.

From Li Li-san's point of view, there was considerable advantage to this interpretation of policy. If Mao Tse-tung complied with Li's instructions he would find it extremely difficult to emphasize the major theme of peasant policy: reliance on the poor peasant as the bedrock support of the Communist movement in the countryside and on the middle peasant as a strong ally. As the Comintern pointed out in its June letter,

the incorrect tactics regarding the kulak mean an erroneous tactic regarding the poor peasants and hired farm workers. The adoption of an alliance with the kulak makes serious work by the party impossible in organizing the agricultural workers, strengthening their struggle, raising the class consciousness of this most backward stratum of the proletariat, which at the same time constitutes the basis of our influence in the villages. . . . If the line of the alliance with the kulak, or even of not sharpening the struggle against him, is maintained, the party will not be able to lead the class struggle of the village poor.<sup>24</sup>

The two policies were contradictory. It would be impossible to gain the simultaneous support of both the rich and the poor peasantry in any one particular area. Attempts to do so would lead, at best, to the continuation of the status quo, at worst, to confusion about the party's objectives in the countryside. Given his conflict with Mao Tse-tung over control of the soviet areas, Li Li-san probably would not have been unhappy with either result.

The third factor precipitating the dispatch of the Comintern letter was the dispute over Li's interpretation of policy toward the rich peasant that

<sup>22</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih hsing wei yüan hui yü chung kuo kung ch'an tang shu kuan yü nung min wen t'i" (Letter of the ECCI to the CCP regarding the peasant question), June 7, 1929, *Hung-se wen-hsien*, pp. 326-27, and Pavel Mif, "Krestianskii vopros v Kitae" (The Peasant Question in China), *Kommunisticheskiei International*, No. 28 (1929), p. 44. Mif's article is a close paraphrase and in cases amplification of the above letter. See also Pavel Mif, *Strategiia i taktika* . . . , pp. 236-45.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> "ECCI Letter to the CCP regarding the Peasant Question," *Hung-se wen-hsien*, pp. 320-21.



arose between Li and Ts'ai Ho-shen in the Central Politburo. Apparently Ts'ai, the last remaining "rightist" member of the Politburo selected at the Sixth Congress, disagreed with Li's interpretation of kulak policy and wrote an article in the Chinese journal *Bolshevik*, to which Li Li-san replied. (Neither article, unfortunately, appears to be available.) It can safely be assumed that Li favored and Ts'ai opposed an "alliance" with the kulak. At any rate, as a result of their disagreement,<sup>25</sup> Ts'ai returned to Moscow. His departure appears to have taken place just before the opening of the CCP's Second Plenum, and may have been one of the reasons for convening it. In its letter, the Comintern referred to the disagreement between Li and Ts'ai. One of the reasons, it stated,

which prompts us to write a special letter is the fact that certain comrades continue to commit the most serious errors in the solution of the peasant question. The latest documents and materials that we have received concerning the work of the Central Committee (the directive on the peasant movement, the letter to Comrade Mao Tse-tung from the Central Committee, the discussion between Ts'ai Ho-shen and Li Li-san in the pages of *Bolshevik* . . .) all indicate that many party comrades do not understand clearly the tactic that the party should apply to the peasant question. . . .<sup>26</sup>

When Ts'ai returned to Moscow, he wrote a second article, the "History of Opportunism in the CCP," which, when read in the context of the dispute with Li Li-san, came very close to calling for the end of the Li Li-san leadership.<sup>27</sup> Ts'ai demanded a complete reorganization and reform of the CCP, extending "to the entire party, not only to separate wings or factions."<sup>28</sup> He stressed that the party should be reorganized by the party masses themselves. "Members of leadership organs must be elected by the masses and enjoy their absolute confidence"; posts should be denied "those whom the masses distrust or who enjoy only the confidence of the higher organs." Without mentioning Li

<sup>25</sup> Chang Kuo-t'ao correspondence with the author.

<sup>26</sup> "ECCI Letter to the CCP regarding the Peasant Question," *Hung-se wen-hsien*, p. 319.

<sup>27</sup> Ts'ai Ho-shen, "Istoriia oportunizma v KPK" (History of Opportunism in the CCP), *Problemy Kitaia*, No. 1 (1929), p. 75. Hsiao Tso-liang, *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934*, p. 27, cites Chang Kuo-t'ao to the effect that "the Comintern had been at variance with Li Li-san since June, 1929, when Ts'ai Ho-shen published an article which Moscow endorsed and Li Li-san condemned."

<sup>28</sup> Ts'ai Ho-shen, "Istoriia oportunizma v KPK," p. 75.



by name, Ts'ai demanded that "systematic opportunists . . . be dismissed from leadership work" and said that the reorganization "must be directed not only against the various leadership organs and responsible comrades . . . but to even the most insignificant cells. . . ."<sup>29</sup> The editors of *Problemy Kitaia* (Pavel Mif was one of fourteen on the editorial board) attempted to offset the harsh tone of the article, saying "when reading this document we must keep in mind that Comrade Ts'ai Ho-shen wrote it during internal party discussions in the CCP, which is inevitably reflected in the general tone of his essay and to some extent in his evaluation of . . . the facts,"<sup>30</sup> but their comments could not conceal the serious split in the Politburo leadership.

### *The Second Plenum of the CCP*

Since his return to China, Li Li-san had been systematically attempting to gain control over the party, both in the city and in the countryside. The departure of Ts'ai Ho-shen enabled him to consolidate his position, at least in the Central Politburo, even further. It was as part of this latter effort—now that only he, Chou En-lai, and Hsiang Chung-fa of the original group selected at Moscow remained in the Politburo—that Li Li-san called the Second Plenum. At the Plenum, which was held in June, Li made every effort to identify the party's policies with those of the Comintern, claiming that "the Central Committee has correctly applied the policies decided upon by the Sixth Congress,"<sup>31</sup> fulfilling its tasks both "under the line of the CCP Sixth Congress and the directives of the Comintern."<sup>32</sup>

These protestations of orthodoxy were undoubtedly made to reassure both the party membership and the Comintern, yet the position taken by the Second Plenum did not in the least reflect the change in policy toward the kulak called for by the Comintern's June letter. The Comintern now called for a policy of complete opposition toward the rich peasant. "The general line of the party," the letter read, "of an alliance with the middle peasant while relying on the poor peasant was replaced by an opportunist line of an 'alliance with the kulak.'" The Comintern

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Materials of the Second Plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP, p. 126, quoted in Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti ssu shih hao* (Central Circular No. 40), "The Spirit and Conclusions of the Second Plenum," July 9, 1929, p. 1.

bluntly commanded that "under no circumstances is an alliance with the kulak permissible."<sup>33</sup>

Making no mention of the June letter, the Second Plenum resolved to continue the policy of nonantagonism toward the rich peasant. The political resolution reads,

tactically, we must recognize that the poor peasant is the crux of the struggle and the middle peasant a strong ally, [but] we still have the possibility of leading the rich peasant . . . to join the anti-imperialist-warlord-landlord-gentry struggle. Therefore, an unconditionally anti-rich peasant line is very erroneous.<sup>34</sup>

Central Circular No. 40, the "spirit and conclusions" of the Second Plenum, written on July 9, over a month after the arrival of the Comintern letter, asserts the same position. "In the present [stage of the] struggle in the countryside, unconditional opposition to the rich peasant is mistaken."<sup>35</sup> Paradoxically, while both of these documents reaffirm the policy of nonantagonism toward the rich peasant, the party pamphlet "Resolutions of the Second Plenum" published in November, 1929, contains both the Comintern letter of June 7 and a reply by the Central Politburo which incorporates the new line!<sup>36</sup>

Only a tentative explanation of this sequence of events can be advanced here. The Comintern's letter arrived in ample time for the new line to be incorporated into the Second Plenum's political resolution, or, at the very least, into the Central's circular of July 9. That the change in line toward the rich peasant was not made at this time is probably related to Li's conflict with Ts'ai Ho-shen. Li recognized that the Comintern letter, which named him as following an incorrect line, would damage his chance to consolidate his position in the Central Politburo, and suppressed the letter for the time being. Having done so, however, he was constrained to maintain his previous position, hence the reaffirmation of the pro-rich-peasant line at the Second Plenum. This decision of Li's may also account for the conflict that erupted between him and

<sup>33</sup> "ECCI Letter to the CCP regarding the Peasant Question," *Hung-se wen-hsien*, pp. 326-27.

<sup>34</sup> *Cheng chih chüeh i an*—*i chiu erh chiu liu yüeh liu chieh erh chung ch'üan hui t'ung kuo* (Political Resolution Passed by the Second Plenum in June, 1929), sec. 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti ssu shih hao* (Central Circular No. 40), sec. 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Kung ch'an tang erh chung ch'üan hui chüeh i an* (Resolutions of the Second Plenum of the CCP), November, 1929.

Chou En-lai at this time.<sup>37</sup> Later in November, when Li had already consolidated his position in the Politburo, he inserted the new anti-rich-peasant policy into the pamphlet "Resolutions of the Second Plenum," then being readied for publication.

Apart from the issue of the rich peasants, the Second Plenum appears to have expressed the views of the Comintern correctly. The Comintern's June letter stressed that the current situation did not

. . . indicate that a powerful revolutionary upsurge, and in particular a peasant movement, has already begun. No, such a conclusion would not agree with the real situation. In citing all these facts, we simply wished to emphasize that, as before, there exists an exceptionally favorable opportunity for the CCP to carry on work among the exploited masses of the peasantry. The party should use this objective situation for propagandizing its agrarian program, re-establishing its revolutionary organizations among the peasantry, preparing for the approaching upsurge of the revolution, and mobilizing the masses under the banners of the ruthless struggle against imperialism and Chinese reaction. . . .<sup>38</sup>

This was essentially the same policy that was set forth at the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928 and which Li Li-san followed at the Second Plenum. In the "spirit and conclusions," it was concluded that

. . . it is wrong to maintain that the upsurge of the revolutionary tide is very remote or imminent. The Plenum calls upon our comrades to be firm in their faith that only our struggles and efforts to win over the masses will determine when the revolutionary tide will arrive. . . .<sup>39</sup>

The dominant tone of the Second Plenum is thus one of "official optimism." The workers' movement was seen to be "on the rise," as was the peasant movement, although the Central lamented its incapacity to exert a greater degree of "leadership" in the countryside. The guerrilla movement was praised, although only passing mention was made of Li Li-san's most formidable problem; the "spirit and conclusions" of July 9

<sup>37</sup> Hsiang Chung-fa recounts the falling out between Li and Chou: "When the Second Plenum took place, Li and Chou disagreed. Although I did not agree with Li's proposals, I could not overcome his argument. Later [during and immediately after the Second Plenum], these two argued often and I tried to mediate between them. One month later they began arguing almost daily with no possibility of reconciliation . . .," *Chuan pien*, (Transformations), pp. 333-34.

<sup>38</sup> "ECCI Letter to the CCP regarding the Peasant Question, *Hung-se wen-hsien*, pp. 321-22.

<sup>39</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti ssu shih hao* (Central Circular No. 40), p. 6.

said only that "several soviet areas and the armies of Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung still exist."<sup>40</sup>

Finally, in a manifesto to the "toilers of China," the Plenum discussed the search of the Soviet consulate at Harbin in May, which the CCP charged was a Kuomintang "provocation."

The search at the Soviet Consulate at Harbin is a proof that the imperialists are taking further steps for an attack on the Soviet Union from the East. . . . The Harbin affair is merely an initial provocation against the U.S.S.R.; the imperialists and the Kuomintang will not be content with that; they will conduct a more serious offensive against the Soviet Union, until, finally, a violent war against the U.S.S.R. will be started. . . . A decisive crisis in the national liberation of China is approaching, and we must be ready to arm in order to support the Soviet Union. We must reply to the anti-soviet war by a revolutionary war.<sup>41</sup>

This was a reference to the incipient stage of a conflict (the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis) which was to dominate the attention and energies of both Moscow and the CCP—but in different ways—throughout the latter half of 1929.

### *The Chinese Eastern Railway Crisis*

Although the Second Plenum first mentioned what was soon to become known as the Chinese Eastern Railway Crisis (CER) in June, the beginnings of the conflict can be traced back several months earlier, to January, 1929. On the twenty-fourth of that month, the Chinese raided Soviet offices at Harbin, arresting several "trade-union officials." During the next week more arrests were made, but all suspects were released by early March. Then, on May 27, the Chinese conducted widespread raids on Soviet consulates all along the Chinese Eastern Railway, at Manchouli, Tsitsihar, Harbin, and Suifenho.<sup>42</sup> Four days later, on May 31, the Soviet Union sent a note of protest to Nanking. (It was during this time that the Second Plenum was held.) The Chinese reply of July 10–11 was to seize the Chinese Eastern Railway, seal off various Soviet state commercial enterprises, and arrest and deport many Soviet

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in L. I., "The First Congress of Representatives of the Soviet Districts in China," *The Communist International*, VII, No. 5 (1930), 38.

<sup>42</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Survey of International Affairs*, 1929, pp. 500–501.



officials, without formally answering either the note of May 31 or subsequent Russian notes and telegrams proposing an inquiry. Finally, the Soviet government declared its dissatisfaction with a Chinese reply to its ultimatum of July 13 and broke off state relations.<sup>43</sup>

A week later, on July 20, China, too, broke off formal state relations. Meanwhile, the governments of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan had initiated diplomatic attempts to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, and on July 22 negotiations between China and the Soviet Union began at Harbin. For the following ten days proposal followed counterproposal until, on August 1, the Soviet representative, M. Karakhan, rejected the latest Chinese note of July 29 sent by Marshal Chang Hsüeh-liang.<sup>44</sup>

General Galen (Blücher), who had been military advisor to the Kuomintang during the period of Soviet-KMT collaboration in the twenties, was appointed head of the Far Eastern forces and on the thirteenth of August the Soviets initiated hostilities with forays into Chinese territory, probing for weak points all along the Manchurian-Siberian frontier.<sup>45</sup> The Soviet Union described its actions at this time as a purely defensive reply to attacks by "white guerrilla forces" that Moscow charged were "equipped and incited" by Chinese authorities.<sup>46</sup> On August 19, the Soviet Union charged China with aggression.<sup>47</sup> During the latter part of August, fighting along the border quieted somewhat while both governments maneuvered diplomatically, the Chinese employing the good offices of the German ambassador. Still, no positive results were obtained. Then, between September 7 and 12, Soviet forces resumed action, attacking Manchouli and Pogradichnaia, and on September 17, Maxim Litvinov, the new Soviet negotiator, rejected the latest set of Chinese proposals.

Up to this point the conflict was a purely local affair. As the conflict dragged on, neither side retreated from its position. Nanking relied on the armies of the Manchurian warlord Chang Hsüeh-liang. The Soviets

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344-69. A current Soviet account of the CER crisis states that it was at this time that the Far Eastern Army was first formed (O. A. Losick, "Piatdesiat let okhraneniia Dalnego Vostoka" (Fifty Years Guarding the Far East), *Dalnyi Vostok* (Far East), No. 1, 1968, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Survey of International Affairs*, 1929, p. 361.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.



used the troops deployed in the Far East, reportedly a relatively small 3,000-man, well-equipped and disciplined force supported by a few aircraft.<sup>48</sup> Suddenly, sometime during late October or early November, Moscow decided to increase the military pressure. From the middle of November the Soviet Union's Far Eastern army stepped up its attacks, penetrating 125 miles into Chinese territory. By November 27, Soviet forces occupied Hailar, Manchouli, Dalai Nor, a lake close to the border near Manchouli,<sup>49</sup> and other points.

It was from this position of strength that the Soviets agreed to resume negotiations. On December 3 a provisional agreement was drawn up. After more discussion, a final settlement was made on December 22—the Khabarovsk protocol—which restored the *status quo ante* regarding the Chinese Eastern Railway, Soviet consulates, and commercial enterprises. Soviet troops were withdrawn, but full diplomatic relations were not restored until 1932.

The Chinese Eastern Railway crisis forms the background against which the events of the second half of the year 1929 occurred. During the crisis the CCP staunchly adopted a position of “proletarian internationalism,” asserting that the Soviet Union must be defended against the combined machinations of the imperialists and their tool, the Kuomintang. This stance provided the opportunity for Ch'en Tu-hsiu, deposed former leader who was still in the party as a relatively minor figure, to oppose the Politburo. Ch'en had been General Secretary of the CCP during the period of collaboration with the Kuomintang. As such he had wielded considerable influence in intellectual circles, but his position in the party was subordinate to that of Borodin, the Soviet advisor sent to aid and reorganize the KMT. Ch'en was dismissed from the party leadership after the fiasco of 1927, but remained as a hanger-on with little or no influence on high-level party affairs after 1927.<sup>50</sup>

When the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis erupted and the CCP proclaimed the slogan of “defend the Soviet Union,” Ch'en attacked the party leadership for adopting an inappropriate policy, perhaps unaware that the slogan had been dictated by Moscow.<sup>51</sup> Ch'en argued that Li

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 145, who claims that Ch'en was Li Li-san's “most formidable” enemy.

<sup>51</sup> CI Letter of Oct. 26, 1929, sec. 4d.

Li-san's slogan only strengthened the hand of the Kuomintang against the CCP, and said rather that the party should simply "oppose the KMT's erroneous policy" as a "fruitless illusion."<sup>52</sup> In an increasingly heated exchange of letters with the Politburo, Ch'en Tu-hsiu moved from a simple attack on the slogan of "defense of the USSR" in the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis to a broader attack on the Li Li-san leadership in general, which set the stage for his expulsion from the party on November 15, 1929, on grounds of intrafactional activities. After writing a manifesto entitled, "A Statement of Our Political Views," in which he called for the restoration of Trotsky's leadership and denounced CI and CCP policies, Ch'en Tu-hsiu, although occasionally dragged out for use as a party whipping-boy, faded into relative obscurity.<sup>53</sup>

*The Comintern Letter of October 26, 1929*

The Chinese Eastern Railway crisis that evoked Ch'en Tu-hsiu's outcry also disturbed Moscow. So long as the conflict had been restricted to the immediate frontier area there was no cause for alarm. When the Soviets expanded the conflict, driving some 125 miles into Manchuria, some thought had to be given to Chinese retaliatory capabilities. Though well equipped, the Soviet force in the area was small (reputedly 3,000 men). Moscow must have considered the possibility that the intrusion into Chinese territory would prompt a counterattack, and that at some level of commitment the Soviet Union would be hard pressed to match the Chinese soldier for soldier—logistics being much less a problem for the Chinese than for the Russians in the area of conflict.

The Soviet Union needed, therefore, to prevent large numbers of Nationalist reinforcements from being sent to Manchuria. Moscow apparently achieved its objective by ordering Chinese Communist guerrilla and "Red Army" forces to increase their activity in China proper, thereby pinning down Nationalist troops that could otherwise have been sent to support those of Chang Hsüeh-liang. In fact, during the crucial months of November and December, the Nationalist government was fully occupied putting down rebellions in central and northwest China, hindered and harassed by demonstrations and strikes in such cities as

<sup>52</sup> A. Martynov, "Chang Du Su's Farewell," *Communist International*, VI, No. 29 (1929-30), 1171.

<sup>53</sup> Ch'en Tu-hsiu, *Wo men ti cheng chih i chien shu* (Our Political Views), 1929.

Shanghai, Tientsin, and Harbin, and was thus unable to send troops to Manchuria.<sup>54</sup>

Here was Machiavellian shrewdness on the part of the Russians; if the Kuomintang ignored the increased unrest in its immediate area and dispatched troops to support Chang Hsüeh-liang in Manchuria, the CCP would undoubtedly strengthen its positions. If, on the other hand, the KMT decided—as it appears to have done—to deal with the local problem, the Soviet Union would achieve its objective along the Chinese Eastern Railway. In the latter case the Chinese Communists would have to be sacrificed.<sup>55</sup>

Ordering the Chinese Communists to step up military activity was one important function of the Comintern's letter to the Central Politburo of October 26, 1929. The letter began on this important note. "Recent events in China prompt us to express our view on the situation developing in the country and to give some preliminary directives concerning the major tasks of the CCP. . . ."

China has entered a period of deep national crisis. This crisis is manifested first, in a revival of fratricidal war among the militarist cliques. . . . Second, in the formation of the KMT Reorganizationist clique (of Wang Ching-wei and Ch'en Kung-po) to oppose the Nanking Kuomintang. . . . Third, in the adventuristic anti-Soviet policy (regarding the Chinese Eastern Railway affair) which sharpens all contradictions. . . . Fourth, in the failure to attract more foreign capital. . . . Fifth, in the obvious failure of the KMT's domestic policy. . . . Sixth, in the depression affecting several branches of industry. . . . Seventh, in the extension and deepening of the agrarian crisis. . . . Eighth, in the general worsening of the conditions of the working class and peasantry. . . . Ninth, in the upsurge of a new wave of the labor movement, which is the beginning of a new revolutionary wave. Tenth, in the revival of

<sup>54</sup> Robert T. Pollard, *China's Foreign Relations, 1917-1931*, p. 396n. See also the speech of Liu Hsiang at the Fifth Congress of the Profintern, in which he said that "during the CER crisis mass demonstrations and strikes were organized by the Chinese section of the Profintern in Shanghai, Harbin, Tientsin . . . , and the Soviet-held areas." *Piatyi kongress Profintern* (Fifth Congress of the Trade Union International), p. 317.

<sup>55</sup> This idea evidently occurred to Trotsky, who said, "Have the Chinese Communists risen in rebellion because of Chiang Kai-shek's seizure of the Chinese Eastern Railway? Has their insurrection, wholly guerrilla in character, as its only aim to cause Chiang Kai-shek the greatest possible uneasiness at his rear? If that is what it is, we ask who has given such counsel to the Chinese Communists? Who bears the political responsibility for their passing over to guerrilla fighting?" "What's Happening in China?" *The Militant*, November 30, 1929, p. 2.

the peasant movement and within it of the guerrilla warfare movement.<sup>56</sup>

Moscow considered the situation in Manchuria so critical that for the first time in Comintern directives to the CCP, it claimed the existence of a "national crisis" for China.

We obviously cannot predict the speed with which the national crisis will turn into a direct revolutionary situation; however the [party] now can, moreover, should prepare the masses to carry out a revolutionary overthrow of the political power of the landlord-capitalist bloc and establish a soviet dictatorship of the workers and peasants by actively developing and moreover daily expanding the revolutionary forms of the class conflict (mass political strikes, the revolutionary demonstrations movement, guerrilla warfare, and so forth).<sup>57</sup>

Although the rest of the document contained even, tempered analysis, the language of this particular passage went further than any other directives sent to the CCP during the period under study—either before or after October, 1929—toward calling for "action." It definitely went further than the July 23 resolution of 1930, which some writers have interpreted as a call for the overthrow of the Nationalist regime (but which, as will be shown, was precisely the opposite).<sup>58</sup> At no time did the Comintern call for nationwide armed uprisings, which could indicate a move to overthrow the Nationalist regime, but emphasized instead work in "the revolutionary forms of the class conflict (mass political strikes, the revolutionary demonstrations movement, guerrilla warfare, and so forth)." This, of course, would be extremely helpful to the Soviet Union in its conflict in Manchuria.

Despite the tone of the passage cited, the October directive was carefully worded; witness the distinction drawn between a "national crisis" and a "direct revolutionary situation." According to Leninist theory, only when a direct revolutionary situation exists can an attempt be made to overthrow the ruling power.<sup>59</sup> In the passage cited, the Soviet

<sup>56</sup> *CI Letter of Oct. 26, 1929*, sec. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

<sup>58</sup> See Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 143. See chap. viii herein for discussion.

<sup>59</sup> Lenin makes the point in somewhat different words. "To be successful, the uprising must be based not on a conspiracy, not on a party, but on the advanced class. This is the first point. The uprising must be based on the revolutionary upsurge of the people. This is the second point. The uprising must be based on the *crucial point* in the history of the maturing revolution, when the activity of the



leaders carefully refrained from making that assertion. Otto Kuusinen, a member of the ECCI and head of the Far Eastern Department of the Comintern,<sup>60</sup> later analyzed the October letter. He stated that it was meant to strengthen the undercover work of the Communist Party, to oppose the illusions of legal and peaceful development, "to expose the policies of the Kuomintang and to mobilize the working masses against this policy," and finally "to eliminate the estrangement between the party and the broad working masses." According to Kuusinen, "at the end of 1929 we said only that China showed weak signs of a revolutionary upsurge" and that the party must encourage the development of the soviet movement.<sup>61</sup>

The Comintern went to great lengths to point out that the CCP was not taking advantage of the turmoil in China. It pointed to the peasant war, development of guerrilla warfare, the expansion of Soviet areas, the revival of the workers' movement, and even to the Moslem and Red Spear revolts, which were considered "objectively revolutionary" despite reactionary leadership. All these, the letter said, constituted "one of the streams of the revolutionary movement, which, in the future, will become the powerful high tide of the nationwide revolutionary movement."<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, the ideological and political influence of the CCP and the organization of the working class still lag behind the growth of mass discontent and revolutionary power. . . . The party has not yet become the skirmisher, the organizer, and the leader in the immediate revolutionary struggle of the broad masses.<sup>63</sup>

Having described the current situation as well as the deficiencies of the party, the Comintern attempted to call attention "to the following basic tasks confronting the party."

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vanguard of the people [the Communist Party] is at its height, when the vacillations in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted, undecided friends of the revolution are at their highest point. This is the third point. It is in pointing out these three conditions as the way of approaching the question of uprising, that Marxism differs from Blanquism." V. I. Lenin, "Marxism and Uprising" (Sept. 1917), *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, II, 404.

<sup>60</sup> Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 78.

<sup>61</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti 'ao lun" (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san Line), Dec., 1930, *Pu-erh-se-wei-k'e* (Bolshevik), IV, No. 3 (May 10, 1931), 48.

<sup>62</sup> *CI Letter of Oct. 26, 1929, sec. 3.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



a) It is necessary to utilize in every way the warlord war that has already begun in order to develop further the independent mass revolutionary movement. . . . The *slogans* 'transform militarist war into class, civil war' and 'overthrow the power of the bourgeois-landlord bloc' should become the basic current slogans of the party.

b) At the same time [the party must] win over the masses; the struggle to win over leadership of the proletariat must also be intensified. First of all the party must oppose the so-called KMT reorganizationist clique . . . which is the main danger at the present time for the further development of the workers' and peasants' revolutionary movement. . . . Now more than ever it is essential to insist on the independent struggle of the workers and peasants under the leadership of our party.

c) The party should pay special attention to the workers' strike movement. In coordinating the economic and political struggle, all efforts must be exerted toward the development of political strikes and toward the preparation of a general political strike. . . .

d) The party must devote more attention to the development of its leadership of the anti-imperialist movement. . . . Every manifestation of the violence on the part of the imperialists should be used to arouse the revolutionary feelings of the masses, to organize political demonstrations and strikes, striving to extend them to the broadest strata of the working class. . . . In connection with the conflict in Manchuria [the CER affair] a campaign must be launched under the specific slogan of 'defense of the USSR,' exposing all KMT factions, including the 'reorganizers,' as agents of imperialism.

e) [The party must] strengthen and extend the guerrilla movement of Mao Tse-tung and Ho Lung, and especially in the area of Manchuria. It must resist energetically the tendencies within the party to underestimate the revolutionary significance of the peasants' struggle, especially guerrilla warfare. There must be more attention paid to work among the soldiers; try to arm as many workers' and peasants' detachments as possible at the expense of militarist units, disarming them and taking possession of their equipment. Capture the districts evacuated by the militarists [those sent north?] and build up a strong position in them. Wherever the mass revolutionary struggle of the peasants is growing and spreading, aim at the establishment of soviet strongholds. In the districts where soviet power exists, actively carry out the confiscation of landlords' estates, arm the peasantry and organize soviets.<sup>64</sup>

In Section 5 of the directive, the Comintern concluded its instructions to the CCP with these words:

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

Under the new conditions the main and fundamental task of the party is to seize the leading role in the revolutionary movement. Avoiding a recurrence of the putschist mistakes which, on the whole, have already been overcome, the party must encourage and accentuate class conflicts in every way, direct the indignation of the masses, advance increasing demands as the conflicts develop, transforming the revolutionary struggle to an even higher stage of development.<sup>46</sup>

Thus the inflammatory words of the October directive were considerably tempered by the actual tasks the CCP was instructed to carry out. The directive was not a call to nationwide revolution. It was a call for increased Communist activity in cities and countryside, among workers and peasants, in the strike and guerrilla movements. The Comintern's directive of October 29, 1929, achieved the desired short-run effect. Activities of the Chinese Communist forces did prevent Kuomintang reinforcements from being sent north, and the Soviet Union did achieve the restoration of the *status quo ante* on the Chinese Eastern Railway. But the directive had long-run effects that were largely if not totally unforeseen by the Comintern, for the October directive apparently provided the initial impetus for the development of the "Li Li-san line."

Li Li-san's problem was always how to achieve and to maintain power in the party within the context of Comintern policy and directives. He would always be faced with the choice of whether to maximize Comintern interests or his own, because it would be all but impossible for him (or any leader) to carry out Comintern instructions completely. Changing local conditions necessitated that some allowance be made for interpretation of policy. There was an added factor in Li's case—the Red Army commanders in the field. So long as the Comintern did not press for policies detrimental to Li's position vis-à-vis the Soviet field leaders, there was no difficulty. However, when the Comintern instructed Li to develop the guerrilla movement, especially in the areas of Mao Tse-tung and Ho Lung, Li had to make the choice between furthering the Comintern's interests in the Chinese Eastern Railway affair, or his own. The forces of the Soviet commanders were increasing as the guerrilla movement gained its own momentum, largely independent of what Li Li-san did or said. Li would not voluntarily add to Mao

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

Tse-tung's strength and weaken his own position. In the short run it would make Mao even more recalcitrant; in the long run it would threaten the very position of leadership that Li sought to maintain. Thus, over the next several months Li Li-san slowly moved to check the shift of real power in the Chinese Communist movement away from the Politburo in Shanghai to the commanders in the field. The October letter provided the point of departure for his efforts.

## 5 / Formation of the Li Li-san Line

Li Li-san's policy of "armed defense of the Soviet Union," which was ordered by the Comintern during the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis in the latter months of 1929, led to drastic changes in intraparty relations with Mao Tse-tung.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese Eastern Railway crisis came at a time when Li Li-san was gaining a firm grip on the reins of party power in Shanghai and Mao Tse-tung was significantly increasing the strength of his position in the countryside.

The Comintern directive of October 26, 1929, coming at the height of the crisis, forced Li Li-san to change his tactics vis-à-vis Mao Tse-tung. Previously, Li had attempted to prevent Mao from consolidating his power in the Soviet areas by directing him to disperse his military forces over the countryside and, on one occasion, by unsuccessfully ordering the removal of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh from command of their troops. The October directive called upon the Li Li-san leadership to "strengthen and extend guerrilla warfare, especially in Manchuria [the scene of the CER crisis] and in the region of Chu Teh and Mao

<sup>1</sup> "Lun kuo ming tang kai tsu p'ai ho chung kuo kung ch'an tang ti jen wu" (A Discussion of the Kuomintang Reorganizationists and the Tasks of the CCP), Oct. 26, 1929, *Hung-ch'i*, Feb. 15, 1930, sec. 4d.



Tse-tung.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the Comintern specifically directed Li Li-san to give full support to his chief rival. Li could no longer continue his attempts to weaken Mao openly and risk flouting the Comintern.

Beginning in December, or more precisely with Central Circular No. 60, which was published on December 7 but which was undoubtedly circulated in the party earlier, Li Li-san abandoned his former tactics and adopted new ones.<sup>3</sup> His objectives—preventing Mao from consolidating his power in the soviets of South China and, ultimately, extending his influence into these areas—were in no way changed. The means of achieving them were merely altered to fit new circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Central Circular No. 60 contains many of the fundamental themes that later became a part of the “Li Li-san line,” but here they were presented in disguised form, ostensibly for the “armed defense of the Soviet Union.” The implications of the circular for future Central policy, therefore, passed unnoticed by all but the most astute party leaders. In the large cities, the circular read, the party was to begin preparations for industrial strikes.<sup>5</sup> In the countryside it was called upon to deepen the agrarian revolution, expand guerrilla warfare, foment peasant discontent—even to incite local revolts, if possible, and “to use all methods to increase the armed struggle of the peasantry.”<sup>6</sup> The party was also to step up its agitation work among warlord troops and attempt to organize troop rebellions.<sup>7</sup> Li instructed the party to open its door to workers and to poor peasants, to expel the rich peasants (belatedly following the Comintern’s June, 1929, directive), and to strengthen ties with the masses in general.<sup>8</sup> The main propaganda target was the Kuomintang, and everything possible was to be done to point out its connections with international imperialism.<sup>9</sup>

These elements were to become part of Li Li-san’s future “line.” They are traceable to earlier Comintern directives, including the resolutions of

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4e.

<sup>3</sup> *Chung yang t’ung kao ti liu shih hao* (Central Circular No. 60), *Hung-ch’i*, Dec. 7, 1929, p. 4 (hereafter cited as Central Circular No. 60).

<sup>4</sup> See Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t’ai* (Red Stage), on Li’s ultimate failure to gain control over Mao’s soviet forces, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> *Chung yang t’ung kao ti liu shih hao* (Central Circular No. 60), sec. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 6.

the Sixth CCP Congress of 1928.<sup>10</sup> However, neither the time limit for the completion of these tasks nor the policy of attacking and taking “important large cities” with the Red Army in the near future was apparent in Comintern instructions. It was precisely in these two areas that Li Li-san’s Central Circular No. 60 departed radically from Comintern guidelines.

Li Li-san reversed his previous policy on the Red Army from “dispersal” to “concentration,” indicating that Red Army attacks on important large cities be undertaken in the near future, with the arrival of a “nationwide” revolutionary tide. First, he maintained, the party

must expand the Red Army’s organization and concentrate its fighting power. Propaganda must be employed to the greatest extent possible to draw the peasant masses into the Red Army. The armed peasant masses must be brought together and turned into a formal Red Army. . . .

Second, each provincial committee must have a concentrated organization and a jointly developed plan for its own Red Army units. Each local Red Army unit must act in accordance with the general plan.

Third, the development of the Red Army must be carried out on a large scale . . . the former strategy of avoiding to take important large cities must be changed . . . we must attack important cities and even occupy them. Taking possession of them in the shortest possible time would have the greatest political significance. The Red Army’s execution of this strategy must be coordinated with the nationwide workers’, peasants’, and soldiers’ struggle to bring closer the great revolutionary tide.<sup>11</sup>

Li had acquiesced to the Comintern directive to build up a Red Army, but continued in his attempts to prevent control over the Red Army from devolving on the Red Army field commanders. In the passage above, Li ordered control over Red Army units to be lodged in the hands of “concentrated” provincial committees, not military commanders. The provincial committees were to arrange for the Red Army’s plans to be “jointly developed” with the field commanders. Later in 1930, just before activating his plans, Li would subsume all provincial committees under a personally controlled “action committee system,” thus assuring at least *pro forma* control over the Red Army.<sup>12</sup> Central Circular No. 60, which was a response to the Comintern’s October

<sup>10</sup> See chap. ii.

<sup>11</sup> Central Circular No. 60, sec. 4.

<sup>12</sup> See chap. viii.

directive, represented the first, still veiled, step taken by Li Li-san toward the formation of his "line"—an attempt to establish some Central control over an expanding Red Army, its mobilization and direction toward China's key cities preparatory to attacking them.

During approximately this same period—December, 1929 to January, 1930—while Li Li-san was basically altering his strategy, Mao Tse-tung was greatly strengthening his own position. In December, Mao convened the Ninth Conference of Red Army delegates at Ku-t'ien in the mountains of western Fukien.<sup>13</sup> The conference signified the consolidation of Mao's control over the burgeoning Red Army in the Kiangsi-Fukien area and his initial attempt at independent policy formulation. The political resolution adopted at the conference called for the correction of "mistaken ideas in the party," such as ultraegalitarian tendencies, disregard for organizational discipline, subordination of political to military affairs, and the subordination of party to individual interests. These aims, of course, were in perfect harmony with Central policy. On the important issues of expanding the Red Army and establishing soviet bases, however, Mao strongly opposed Li Li-san's policies, which avoided all mention of soviet bases. In the section titled "On the Ideology of Roving Bandits," Mao wrote:

(1) Some people want to increase our political influence only by means of roving guerrilla actions, but are unwilling to increase it by undertaking the difficult tasks of building up base areas and establishing the people's political power. (2) In expanding the Red Army, some people follow the line of 'hiring men and buying horses' and 'recruiting deserters and accepting mutineers,' rather than the line of expanding the local Red Guards and the local troops and thus developing the main forces of the Red Army. (3) Some people lack the patience to carry on arduous struggles together with the masses and only want to go to the big cities to feast. . . . The eradication of this ideology is an important objective in the ideological struggle within the Red Army and party organizations.<sup>14</sup>

"Some people," of course, referred to the Li Li-san leadership; "hiring men and buying horses" and impatience to "go to the big cities . . ." apparently refer to the policy Li had set forth in his Central Circular No. 60. Mao's espousal of the gradual establishment of soviet base areas,

<sup>13</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "On Correcting Some Mistaken Ideas in the Party" (Dec. 1929), *Mao Tse-tung hsüan-chi*, I, 87.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

aside from being in complete agreement with Comintern instructions, was undoubtedly viewed by him as the best means to increase his own strength both in an absolute sense and in relation to that of Li Li-san. The instructions in Circular No. 60 to expand the Red Army and adopt a strategy of attacking large cities would only thwart the plan to build up soviet bases.

Less than a month later, Mao Tse-tung again leveled direct and unveiled criticism at the Central Politburo of the CCP on these and other issues. His remarks were contained in a letter dated January 5, 1930, and titled "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire."<sup>15</sup> Mao referred to current plans for "nationwide armed insurrection" as lacking "deep understanding" and termed Li's plans to move on large cities as "roving guerrilla actions [which] cannot accomplish the task of accelerating the nationwide revolutionary high tide."<sup>16</sup> Mao saw his own plan as the only correct one.

The kind of policy adopted by Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung and also by Fang Chih-min is undoubtedly correct—that is, the policy of establishing base areas; of systematically setting up political power; of deepening the agrarian revolution; of expanding the people's armed forces by a comprehensive process of building up first the township Red Guards, then the district Red Guards, then the county Red Guards, then the local Red Army troops, all the way up to the regular Red Army troops; of spreading political power by advancing in a series of waves, and so forth. . . . Only thus is it really possible to create a Red Army that will become the chief weapon for the great revolution of the future. In short, only thus is it possible to hasten the revolutionary high tide.<sup>17</sup>

Mao's "orthodoxy" (his rural strategy closely followed that formulated by the Comintern, albeit with some elaboration, at the Sixth Congress of the CCP) undoubtedly contributed to the confident manner in which he defied the Central Politburo. Under the pretext of combating pessimistic views in the party, Mao boldly censured Central military policies dating back to early 1929—the period when Li Li-san began to dominate the Central leadership—calling them "unrealistic."<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, Mao resubmitted his proposal, made the previous April, to

<sup>15</sup> Mao, "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire" (Jan. 1930), *ibid.*, pp. 101–11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



take the province of Kiangsi. He admitted being overoptimistic in his original claim that Kiangsi could be taken within a year. He urged, nevertheless, that the plan be adopted in place of Li's policy (although Mao did not explicitly label this policy as Li Li-san's) of extending Communist influence throughout the country without consolidation of base areas and then launching a "nationwide armed insurrection, which, with the participation of the Red Army, would become a great nationwide revolution."<sup>19</sup> It was Mao's view that

the political and the organizational lines laid down by the party's Sixth National Congress are correct, that is, the revolution at the present stage is democratic and not socialist, and the present task of the party (the words 'in big cities' should have been added here) is to win over the masses and not to stage immediate insurrections.<sup>20</sup>

Mao reasserted that only a policy of "spreading political power by advancing in a series of waves," that is, by systematically building power bases and employing these bases as points from which to expand further, could succeed. This was entirely consonant with the policy of winning power in one or more provinces enunciated at the Sixth Congress of the CCP. The policy of moving on large cities to launch a nationwide uprising was not.

The Ku-t'ien Conference in December 1929, and especially the "Spark" letter of January 5, 1930, seem to mark the end of Mao's passive resistance to the Li Li-san leadership. From this point on Mao acted independently, outside Central policies and paying but scant lip service to Central circulars. Mao's proposal to concentrate his efforts on Kiangsi and his claim that his policy was the only correct one were clear indications that he intended to function autonomously, independent of Li Li-san's Central Committee wherever possible. The reasons for this are also clear: he had strengthened his position perceptibly in the past year, and the Comintern had accorded him public support.

### *Further Hardening of Positions*

Li Li-san fully understood the significance of the conference at Ku-t'ien and the "Spark" letter. These events forced him into a further elaboration of his own plans. In Central Circular No. 68 of February 4, 1930, Li announced that a conference of delegates from Soviet areas

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106. The insertion is Mao's.

would be held on May 1 of that year.<sup>21</sup> He explained that because of the growing strength of the Red Army and the soviets in conjunction with the increasingly debilitating effects of internecine warfare among the warlord factions, the CCP must "unite the soviet areas of the whole nation with the Red Army . . . under the leadership of the working class."<sup>22</sup>

Recent developments justified a conference of this sort. Mao had indeed increased the power of the Red Army (as, to be sure, he increased his own personal power) as had other Red Army commanders. While the soviet movement in general had experienced considerable success during the latter months of 1929,<sup>23</sup> warlords were jockeying for partners and positions in a different struggle. Feng Yü-hsiang and Yen Hsi-shan had already joined forces; it was common knowledge that they were planning hostilities against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government.<sup>24</sup> It was not difficult to foresee possible advantageous circumstances arising out of a conflict among the warlords if the Communist forces were prepared.

The purpose of the Soviet Delegates' Conference, as stated in Central Circular No. 68, was to link up the activities of the Red Army and the soviet areas, and to unite them under the leadership of the proletariat. Further, these activities were to be coordinated with the party's urban work. Such an integration of the Communist movement required lengthy discussions of strategy and tactics. Policy for each soviet area must be decided and the various Red Army units must be allocated spheres of operations. All guerrilla areas and Red Army forces, it was stated, "must come under unified direction" of the CCP Central Committee.<sup>25</sup>

Conditions suggested that the warlord struggle would culminate somewhere in east-central China. Li Li-san ordered that Chinese Communist forces, strong in the south, begin to "develop toward the north and to motivate the broad peasant masses of the north to join the agrarian revolution."<sup>26</sup> Accompanying the movement of Communist forces northward, Li Li-san had planned a "broad [propaganda] movement to

<sup>21</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti liu shih pa hao* (Central Circular No. 68), Feb. 4, 1930 (hereafter cited as Central Circular No. 68).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> H. G. W. Woodhead (ed.), *China Yearbook*, 1931, p. 431.

<sup>25</sup> Central Circular No. 68, sec. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

support the soviets and the Red Army.”<sup>27</sup> He thus planned to bring Communist forces into a position from which they would be most able to take advantage of any opportunity arising from the imminent warlord conflict. At the same time he was not blind to the fact that the Red Army would be more susceptible to control once moved from the power base in South China and stationed closer to the source of Central power. The reason Li gave for calling the conference, however, was to integrate Communist forces and to “bring closer a direct revolutionary situation and even more quickly the arrival of political power in one or several provinces.”<sup>28</sup>

Of course, continued Circular No. 68, “the Central should determine the main representatives of each soviet area and Red Army unit”<sup>29</sup> to the May 1 conference, which would be a preparatory meeting where drafts would be discussed, plans made, and so forth. Later, the actual conference would be held in some predetermined soviet area. As a general criterion of representation, read the circular, each Red Army unit should have at least one representative and each soviet area at least two; each guerrilla area and each area of peasant struggle should have at least one representative as well, but no one organization had the right to send more than five representatives to the preparatory conference.<sup>30</sup> In this manner Li Li-san sent out the call for the preparatory conference of delegates of soviet areas, requesting that the leaders of the various organizations let him know if they intended to attend the conference.

Meanwhile, as the contents of Central Circular No. 68 were being communicated to the party rank and file, Mao Tse-tung was holding a conference of his own. On February 7 in south Kiangsi, he convened a conference that was

. . . attended by local representatives from the Party, the Army and the Government. Here the question of the land policy was argued at great length, and the struggle against ‘opportunism’ led by those opposed to redistribution was overcome. It was resolved to carry out land redistribution and [to] quicken the formation of Soviets.<sup>31</sup>

Until this conference, Mao’s Fourth Army had undertaken relatively small-scale operations and had formed only district soviets in the south-

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*, pp. 174–75.

ern Kiangsi-Fukien area. As such, his activities were hardly distinguishable to an outsider from those of ordinary bandits. The February 7 conference marked the establishment of the first soviet government on a provincial level (although, in fact, the Kiangsi Provincial Soviet did not cover the entire province).<sup>32</sup>

The February 7 conference was significant as another indication of Mao's growing strength. By proclaiming the establishment of the Kiangsi Provincial Soviet, Mao was able to accomplish several things: First, as chairman of a provincial committee, he was now able to assume full command of Red Army forces in accordance with the restriction Li had placed on field commanders' power in Circular No. 60. Second, Mao had taken the initial step toward completion of his plan to capture the entire province of Kiangsi. Third, he had enacted his own land policy<sup>33</sup> and, fourth, he had refused to comply with Central Circular No. 68, ordering Communist forces to "develop toward the north."

Mao's pre-emptive action left Li Li-san with no feasible alternative but to disclose his strategic plan before Mao's program could gain momentum. In Circular No. 70 of February 26, 1930, he set forth the first clear and unconcealed formulation of what was soon to be called the "Li Li-san line."<sup>34</sup> Central Circular No. 70 followed the usual format of Central circulars, but its content was vastly different. "The present nationwide crisis," it read, "is deepening daily and the new revolutionary wave is developing forward." The warlord war had continued to expand, the circular said, and had affected every facet of Chinese life. All this was creating the objective basis for the maturation of a "new revolutionary high tide."<sup>35</sup> The intense activity among the workers, the deepening of the peasant struggle, the victories of the Red Army and the expansion of Soviet areas confirmed, according to the circular, that "the nationwide mass struggle is developing *evenly*."<sup>36</sup>

The party, the circular continued, had made great progress in the past half-year. Its organizational base had been stabilized, the number of working-class party members had increased by over 1,300, industrial

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>33</sup> See Hsiao Tso-liang, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934*, for an analysis of the various land policies promulgated during this period.

<sup>34</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti ch'i shih hao* (Central Circular No. 70), Feb. 26, 1930 (hereafter cited as Central Circular No. 70).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis added).



cells had doubled, and urban work had not only revived from its previous low, but especially in key cities like Wuhan, Canton, and Harbin, had made great strides forward.<sup>37</sup> In the light of these developments, the party's general line must be to intensify its efforts to win over the masses, to organize them, and to prepare for armed uprisings on a nationwide scale.

Li Li-san then introduced his plan, that the central strategy of this new general line must be concentration and attack (*chi chung chin kung*).<sup>38</sup> The party must "organize workers' political strikes, local uprisings, troop rebellions, and expand the Red Army. . . ." Only through the resolute carrying out of this strategy could the revolution be successful.

Only under the general line of concentration and attack to strengthen the party's subjective forces, will the revolution be able to obtain a nationwide victory, first winning an initial victory in one or several provinces. From the development of the current revolutionary situation, a future victory in one or several provinces clearly can be seen, especially in the Wuhan area and its surrounding provinces. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Next came further explanation and instructions for executing the new plan. First, when organizing workers' political strikes, the main focus must be placed on "organizing an all-industry general strike."<sup>40</sup> Progression should be from factory political strikes to city, province, and nationwide strikes to the all-industry general strike. In these struggles the party "must employ the action committee organizations."<sup>41</sup> Over the next several months, Li Li-san relied increasingly on "action committees" to execute his policies and to extend his control over recalcitrant organizations.<sup>42</sup>

Second, the party should penetrate the peasants' struggle for land and fuse it with its own guerrilla struggle. It was by means of local uprisings, the circular read, that soviet areas were to be expanded. The erroneous tendency to be opposed at all costs was the "peasant mentality," which was reflected in the bandit concepts of ascend-mountainism (*shang shan*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4, No. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> See chap. viii for a fuller discussion of the role of the action committee in Li's plans.

*ch'ing hsiang*), defensism (*pao shou kuan tien*), and dispersal tactics (*fen san cheng ts'e*).<sup>43</sup> (In the "Resolution on Some Historical Questions," in his *Selected Works*, Mao Tse-tung claimed that Li Li-san had labeled his views on guerrilla warfare as "absolutely erroneous and localism and defensism of a peasant mentality.")<sup>44</sup> Guerrilla warfare, Circular No. 70 continued, could not remain on the level of small-scale conflict. It must be linked up with the strike struggle in the cities and the troop rebellion movement among the Kuomintang armies in order to develop the political situation and to bring about a "nationwide direct revolutionary situation."<sup>45</sup>

Third, the organization of troop rebellions among the warlord armies was to be an essential aspect of the central strategy. There was to be no vacillation toward this highly important work. The party must strive to organize "soldiers' committees" (*shih ping wei yüan hui*) within the armies of the warlords and strive to gain control of these committees. The circular directed that all actual troop rebellions should be coordinated with the local peasant struggle.<sup>46</sup>

Fourth, it continued, although progress had been made in building up the Red Army, it must be further strengthened by the inclusion of the armed peasantry in its ranks. At the same time, the Red Army's development northward must be accelerated and its operations co-ordinated with the workers' struggle in the key cities.

The growth of the Red Army has been due to the deepening of the agrarian revolution and to the developing of guerrilla warfare, but, seen from the point of view of the proletariat, only if it is employed according to the principle of concentration and attack can it become an even stronger direct motivating force [in the revolution] . . . only under this principle can the Red Army advantageously make preparations for a nationwide uprising.<sup>47</sup>

Tactically, this section concluded, the Red Army "must develop toward communications, main roads, and key cities."<sup>48</sup>

Fifth, the party must carry the anti-imperialist, anti-warlord propaganda movement into the villages in the countryside and into the ranks

<sup>43</sup> Central Circular No. 70, sec. 4, No. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Mao Tse-tung hsüan-chi*, III, 962.

<sup>45</sup> Central Circular No. 70, sec. 4, No. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4, No. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4, No. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

of the enemy armies as well as into the cities. In propaganda the reformist party must be opposed, as this group had obstructed the development of a revolutionary high tide and caused the working masses to accept a compromise course.<sup>49</sup>

In the concluding section of Circular No. 70, Li Li-san discussed the role of the Central Committee of the CCP. "In arranging work, the Central must strengthen its political leadership over local party sections." In this respect, "the Central Party paper can become a key force in directing nationwide policy and in organizing the masses."<sup>50</sup> The internal party struggle against "rightists" and "liquidationists" must be carried forward. All party members must recognize that the activities of the Ch'en Tu-hsiu liquidationists and the opposition faction were extremely harmful to the party. It must be specially pointed out that, under present conditions, the liquidationists would decry the "party's political line as putschism," which, of course, must be resolutely opposed. The party must eliminate all "rightists" from its ranks "in order to assure the revolution's final victory."<sup>51</sup> Interestingly enough, Li Li-san accused Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh of being "rightists" in his speech to the Third Plenum in September, 1930, and an ex-Communist reported that Li called Mao and Chu "rightists" at this time because they refused to go along with his plans to attack large cities.<sup>52</sup>

Li Li-san attempted to dissemble the radical change in the party line embodied in Circular No. 70 by asserting that the "present line of concentration of forces and aggressive attacks, laid down in Central Circular No. 60 is completely correct."<sup>53</sup> As mentioned earlier, in early December, 1929, Li Li-san had proposed a policy of concentration of forces, but for the armed defense of the Soviet Union, which was then heavily involved with the Nationalist government over the Chinese Eastern Railway.<sup>54</sup> At that time, such a policy was supported and even encouraged by the Comintern. Now, several months after the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis had been settled, Li Li-san was again proposing

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Li Li-san's speech to the Third Plenum, Sept. 1930; see Li, "Po Shan fa yen" (Speech of Po Shan [Li Li-san]), Third Plenum Materials, No. 10, sec. 4, No. 6; Kung Ch'ü, *Wo yü hung chün* (The Red Army and I), p. 255.

<sup>53</sup> Central Circular No. 70, sec. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Hung-ch'i*, No. 60, Dec. 7, 1929, sec. 4, p. 4.

"concentration of forces," not for armed support of the Soviet Union but for an attempt to topple the Nationalist government by means of a nationwide armed uprising. There was no referent Comintern directive for this, nor did Li Li-san attempt to cite one.<sup>55</sup>

Having made a rather unconvincing attempt to show continuity between his new policy and the previous one, Li Li-san took the offensive. He complained that many party members still did not understand clearly the strategy to be employed at the present time. For instance, Li said, the objective in the workers' movement was to organize an all-industry general strike and not merely to organize political strikes and demonstrations.<sup>56</sup> In the countryside peasant struggles had resulted in spontaneous local uprisings in several places, yet local party leaders had hesitated to lead this movement. Similarly, local party cadres had virtually ignored the task of inciting troop rebellions and of spreading propaganda among the warlord troops. Another serious deficiency was that

. . . the Red Army's concentrate-and-attack [strategy] has had definite success in some places (such as in Eastern Hupei, Northeastern Hupei, and in Southwestern Kiangsi), but in the important Red Armies of Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung and in Western Hupei the former hide-and-disperse view [*to pi ho fen san ti kuan tien*] still persists.<sup>57</sup>

Circular No. 70 is the first comprehensive and undisguised formulation of what was later called the "Li Li-san line." In it was outlined a strategy of imminent state conquest, the crucial elements of which were

<sup>55</sup> Hsiang Chung-fa, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Wang Ming, and Lo Mai all have observed or suggested that Central Circular No. 70 appeared to be the real point of departure of Li's policies from those of the Comintern. For Hsiang Chung-fa's comments, see Hsiang Chung-fa (T'e Sheng), *Chung yang cheng chih chü kung tso pao kao* (Central Politburo Work Report), Third Plenum Materials, No. 8, p. 4, and Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo Report), Hsiang's report to the Fourth Plenum, p. 12. Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's remarks are in *Cheng chih chü kuo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting), leaves 12, 29–30. For Ch'en Shao-yü's (Wang Ming) comments see *Wei chung kung keng chia pu erh se wei k'e hua erh tou cheng* (Struggle for the Further Bolshevization of the CCP), pp. 61–62 (hereafter cited as *Further Bolshevization*). For Lo Mai's comments see his speech of Dec. 3, 1930, *Tsen yang su ch'ing Li-san lu hsien* (How to Liquidate the Li-san Line), sec. 5. Li Li-san, in his speech to the Third Plenum, refers to the importance of Central Circular No. 70 without, however, admitting that he had deviated from Comintern policy in any way; see Li, *Po Shan fa yen* . . . , sec. 5, No. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Central Circular No. 70, sec. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



general industrial strikes leading to urban uprisings, widespread rural uprisings, troop rebellions, and attacks on key cities by the Red Army. Regarding the Red Army, Li Li-san had now come full circle from his previous position. Before the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis, Li had stressed the dispersal of the Red Army as a means of limiting the accumulation of power by individual commanders in the field, principally Mao Tse-tung. Now Li demanded a rapid build-up of the Red Army, a transformation of tactics first suggested in Circular No. 60 and clearly called for in Circular No. 70, where Li Li-san stated, ". . . under present circumstances, all views that advocate dispersing the Red Army, hiding from enemy attacks, or expanding into remote areas, are extremely erroneous, liquidationist views."<sup>58</sup>

Three points demand restatement. The use of the Red Army was an integral part of Li Li-san's "line" from its inception.<sup>59</sup> Second, the injunction that the Red Army engage the forces of the Kuomintang and attack directly the large cities of China, which were under Kuomintang control, indicates that Li's major objective was the overthrow of the Nationalist regime in the very near future. Third, there is no evidence to support the view that the Comintern directed the CCP to make this shift of policy.

The major differences in strategy between Li Li-san and Mao Tse-tung and between both of them and the Comintern at this point in time are quite clear. While Li urged the total mobilization of Communist forces and their preparation as a striking force, Mao continued to build his power base in the Kiangsi-Fukien region, avoiding the main forces of the Kuomintang. For whatever motives, Li was preparing for an imminent Armageddon; Mao preferred to defer final confrontation with the enemy to some later, unspecified date. On this question of a build-up of a Red Army and the establishment and expansion of soviets, Mao Tse-tung was clearly much closer to Comintern policy than Li Li-san, whose major objective appears to have been to weaken Mao's position in the soviet areas. Finally, no Comintern instruction, including the resolu-

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Benjamin I. Schwartz, in a book review in *The China Quarterly*, No. 12. (Oct.-Dec., 1962), p. 232, asserts to the contrary that "the strategy of using the Red armies to attack and occupy urban centres . . . , was, after all, the operational cutting-edge of the 'Li Li-san line.' Li Li-san, as we know, had himself come to this strategy with great reluctance. He would have much preferred to take cities in orthodox revolutionary fashion by proletarian insurrection from within, without the necessity of relying on the Red armies. . . . By June 11, however, he had in his desperation come to support this strategy."

tions of the Sixth Congress of the CCP, can be interpreted to suggest that Li Li-san's policies had the approval of or were indeed ordered by Moscow.<sup>60</sup>

### *Reaction in the Party and in Moscow*

Reaction to Li Li-san's new strategy was mixed. Some party members accepted the policy change without question simply because it had emanated from higher party authority. Others were dubious; a few even termed Li's plans "suicidal."<sup>61</sup> Mao Tse-tung, of course, had opposed the Li Li-san leadership for some time. Over the next few months, Li acted strenuously to consolidate support for the position expressed in Circular No. 70. He eliminated what opposition he could, placed his own followers in key positions, and neutralized those he could not eliminate. He justified his actions on the grounds that those who opposed him were either "agents of the liquidationist clique," or were actually "vacillating 'rightist' liquidationists."<sup>62</sup>

Li Li-san sent trusted followers to all levels of party organization. Ho Ch'ang, for instance, was sent to work in an undisclosed local party bureau.<sup>63</sup> Ta Lin-p'i (pseudonym?) was sent to take charge of the Yangtze party bureau.<sup>64</sup> The Kiangsu provincial organization reacted with as much hostility to Li's plans as it had before. Li had had continued difficulty with this key organization ever since his return from Moscow in the fall of 1928.<sup>65</sup> Lo Mai, a faithful lieutenant, was sent to take over command of the Kiangsu organization.<sup>66</sup> By early March, 1930, an action committee was established in Shanghai, the headquarters of the Kiangsu provincial organization.<sup>67</sup> In general, action committees were special organs of party power, which appear to have been superimposed

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion of this point see the author's comment in *The China Quarterly*, No. 18 (April-June, 1964), pp. 200-204.

<sup>61</sup> *Kung tang nei mo i chi p'eng k'uei* (The Inside Story of the CCP and Its Collapse), p. 12 (hereafter referred to as *Secret*). This appears to be a report made by a Kuomintang agent who infiltrated into the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> See chap. iii, and Lo Mai, "Li-san lu hsien tsai Kiangsu kung tso chung ti chien yüeh" (A Review of the Li-san Line in the Work of Kiangsu), *Shih-hua*, No. 9, Feb. 7, 1931, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Secret*, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Chuan pien*, p. 122, statement of Hsü Ping-ken.

on existing party organizations by administrative decree. An action committee combined the functions and authorities of other Communist organizations—trade unions, peasant associations, youth organizations, and revolutionary committees.<sup>68</sup> The key significance of action committees, it seems, was that their formation allowed Li Li-san to neutralize opposition that he could not otherwise eliminate. In this way Li could avoid an open struggle to oust hostile party incumbents, outflanking them by administrative action. Of course, the effectiveness of such organs, whether they actually could exercise the authority delegated to them and command the loyalties of the party rank and file, is another question. In any case, the formation of action committees increased over the next few months, especially after June, 1930, at least formally strengthening Li Li-san's position.

The most critical response to Li's new strategy came not from subordinates in lower-echelon party organizations, but from the very top—in the Politburo of the CCP. Central Circular No. 70 appears to have been the culminating act in a relatively long-standing disagreement between Li Li-san and Chou En-lai. Sources regarding top-level relations of members of the CCP Politburo are scanty, but Hsiang Chung-fa, nominally Secretary-General of the CCP, discussed the relations of Li and Chou in particular in his report to the Kuomintang police after his capture in June, 1931.<sup>69</sup> Hsiang, if anyone, was in a position to have intimate knowledge of the state and kind of Politburo interpersonal relations. As mentioned above, Hsiang related that Li Li-san and Chou En-lai had disagreed over policy at the Second Plenum in June, 1929, and thereafter quarreled frequently and heatedly.<sup>70</sup> Hsiang's attempts to reconcile the two leaders were fruitless. The breach between the two widened steadily until Chou decided to return to Moscow "to report" to the Comintern.<sup>71</sup>

Hsiang states that Chou returned to the Soviet Union sometime after January, 1930.<sup>72</sup> Other sources suggest the spring of 1930 as the time of Chou's departure from Shanghai. The Kuomintang had successfully

<sup>68</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t'ao lun" (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san Line), *Bolshevik*, IV, No. 3 (May 10, 1931), 10, 55.

<sup>69</sup> *Chuan pien*, pp. 331–43, Appendix: "A Concise History of Hsiang Chung-fa."

<sup>70</sup> See chap. iv.

<sup>71</sup> *Chuan pien*, p. 334.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

placed an agent in the Far Eastern Office of the Comintern (Dalburo) in Shanghai. The Dalburo was probably the only organization in China to which the CCP top leadership reported and was responsible. The agent's information would thus appear to have a high degree of credibility. His report, written in mid-1931, also suggests that Chou En-lai left China for the Soviet Union sometime in early 1930, probably shortly after the promulgation of Central Circular No. 70 in late February.<sup>73</sup>

Chang Kuo-t'ao, who was in Moscow at the time, supports this. According to him, Chou arrived in Moscow in the spring of 1930.<sup>74</sup> If the makers of the Comintern's China policy did not recognize the major shift contained in Circular No. 70, Chou En-lai certainly informed them of it on his arrival. Since copies of Central circulars were sent to Moscow as a matter of policy, Moscow undoubtedly would have seen the discrepancy between their "line" and that pursued by Li Li-san soon enough. Chou's personal trip to Moscow tended to emphasize the urgency of the situation and the necessity for quick action. Its importance lay in that it allowed the leaders of the Comintern time to take countermeasures against Li Li-san before the latter's plans could be fully implemented.

Moscow's countermeasure was to send a hand-picked group of Chinese who were then studying at Moscow's Sun Yat-sen Academy back to China to bring the policies of Li Li-san back into line, or possibly to oust the leader of the CCP.<sup>75</sup> But the proponents of this course of action had difficulty in obtaining its acceptance among the Chinese Communists in Moscow, of which there were at least two categories. One was the Chinese "students" attending Sun Yat-sen Academy, a school for training Asian revolutionaries that emphasized instruction in guerrilla warfare techniques.<sup>76</sup> Another was the CCP's "representatives" to the Comintern.

The line between these two categories was probably not so clear-cut as drawn here. Some Chinese could belong to both groups, either simultaneously or sequentially. Pre-eminent among the "students" were Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), Ch'in Pang-hsien (Po Ku), Chang Wen-

<sup>73</sup> *Secret*, sec. 6, No. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 62. Chang assumed that Chou had been summoned to Moscow by Pavel Mif.

<sup>75</sup> See *Chuan pien*, pp. 58, 238, and "Kung ch'an kuo chih wei . . ." (ECCI Discussion of the Li-San Line), p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin Gitlow, *The Whole of Their Lives*, p. 250.



t'ien (Lo Fu), Wang Chia-hsiang, Shen Tse-min, Ho Tzu-shu, and others. Among the "representatives" were Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Chang Kuo-t'ao, Yü Fei, and, after his arrival, Chou En-lai. Pavel Mif, whose idea it apparently was to send a select group back to China, had chosen Ch'en Shao-yü and the others, who were strongly pro-Soviet and intensely loyal to the Stalin leadership. Mif was not only in charge of China affairs, that is, the CCP, but was also the director of the Sun Yat-sen Academy and co-editor of *Problemy Kitaia*, a journal of Chinese affairs.<sup>77</sup>

There was heated disagreement among the Comintern "representatives" from the CCP over the plan to send Ch'en Shao-yü and his group of "students" back to China. Chang Kuo-t'ao seems to have done his best to thwart the Li Li-san leadership (*tao t'a ti tan*).<sup>78</sup> He, along with Chou En-lai, probably approved of Mif's plan. There is no indication of what Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's position was on this matter. Yü Fei, on the other hand, strongly opposed Mif's proposal. His account of the episode, given after he had defected to the Kuomintang in 1931, was:

Mif is also a shameless thing. Several times he thought to win over the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, demanding permission to send Ch'en Shao-yü and the others back to China. At that time I was the Chinese Communist Party's representative to Moscow and also organizational chief. Knowing what his idea was, I refused, but afterwards, without waiting for permission from the representative [Yü Fei], he sent Ch'en Shao-yü and the others back to China anyway via Europe.<sup>79</sup>

It was safer and faster to travel to Shanghai via Europe than by the Trans-Siberian and Chinese railways. Communications in China were disrupted by the constant fighting among the warlords, and the Comintern needed to have its men in Shanghai as quickly as possible to head off Li Li-san before he activated his plans. In the spring of 1930, Ch'en Shao-yü and his group, the Russian Returned Students or twenty-eight Bolsheviks, as they were variously and somewhat deprecatingly called, returned to China.

<sup>77</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>78</sup> *Secret*, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Chuan pien*, pp. 68, 238.

## 6 / Development of the Li Li-san Line

The departure of Chou En-lai for Moscow meant that the next few months would be critical for Li Li-san. Chou's report to the Comintern could only be adverse, and Li could expect that Moscow would soon take measures to check him. But what measures, Li could not know; he knew only that if he were to act it must be soon. Paradoxically, although Chou's departure forced Li's hand, at the same time it made it easier for Li to act. Now only Li and Hsiang Chung-fa, puppet secretary of the CCP, remained in the top policy-making positions in the Central Politburo, and Hsiang was not inclined to oppose Li's views too vehemently.

The dilemma latent in Li Li-san's position since early 1929 was now reality.<sup>1</sup> He had consistently and deliberately chosen to achieve personal power at the expense of the Chinese Communist movement as a whole, risking discovery—and therefore dismissal—by the Comintern. Despite his efforts, real power had slipped gradually from his grasp to that of the party leaders in the countryside, although this power was not yet held by any one individual. Mao Tse-tung was apparently the first of the Red Army leaders in the countryside to recognize that power had passed

<sup>1</sup> See chap. iii.

from the Shanghai-based Central Committee to the hands of commanders in the field, hence the struggle between them. Li Li-san had weakened his own position to the extent that he carried out the Comintern's directives to strengthen the Chinese Communist movement in the countryside. With Chou's departure, the other horn of the dilemma, discovery by the Comintern, had become an imminent reality as well.

The alternatives for Li Li-san in early 1930 were clearly drawn: he could back down, attempt to reconcile his differences with Moscow, and wait for another opportunity to reassert control over the movement; or he could proceed with his plans. Li Li-san chose the latter course, but his motive is far from clear. Perhaps he believed that it was already too late to turn back, that the Comintern would not permit him both to recant and to continue on as leader of the CCP. He may also have believed that unless he could gain a firm grip on the Red Army in the near future, and especially on Mao Tse-tung, who controlled the "strongest, most vital, and disciplined part of the Red Army,"<sup>2</sup> he would be powerless to assert control later. On the other hand, Li may have felt that the anticipated outcome of his policy—control over a unified Communist movement with a politically significant urban power base in Central China—would stay Moscow's hand. In any case, Li Li-san decided to embark on an extremely risky course of action.

His first step was to form a "national" newspaper which would serve as a forum for his policies.<sup>3</sup> He had had full control of the party's main publishing facilities since his return to China in 1928.<sup>4</sup> To ensure that his views would not be contradicted, he proscribed the publication of some papers then being published by the party, such as *Pu-erh-se wei-k'e* (Bolshevik) and combined others, like *Hung-ch'i san jih-k'an* (Every Third Day Red Flag) with *Hung-ch'i* (Red Flag).<sup>5</sup> This step was taken

<sup>2</sup> *Biulleten Nauchno-issledovatel'skovo instituta po Kitaiu pri assotsiatsii po izucheniu natsionalno-kolonialnykh problemakh*, No. 1, Jan. 26, 1930, p. 31, and N. Smolov, "Nekotorye problemy partizanskogo dvizheniia v Kitae" (Some Problems of the Guerrilla Movement in China), *Problemy Kitaia*, No. 3 (1930), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> See *Shih-hua*, No. 9, Feb. 7, 1931, "Cheng chih chü kuan yü tang pao te chüeh i" (Politburo Resolution on the Party Paper), and Hung Yi, "Lieh ning chu i yü tang pao" (Leninism and the Party Paper), pp. 2-3; see also the article by Hung Yi, "Li Li-san lu hsien yü tang pao" in *Na borbu s Lilisanizmom*, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai* (Red Stage), p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), *Wei chung kung keng chia pu erh se wei k'e hua erh tou cheng* (Struggle for the Further Bolshevization of the CCP), p. 57.

early in March, 1930. On March 8, a selection from Lenin on the importance and necessity of a national party paper for unifying the party's thought, was printed in *Hung-ch'i*. The editorial comment read, "We hope that the comrades all over China will arise to strengthen and to assist China's Central newspaper."<sup>6</sup>

The establishment of a national "Central" newspaper was very important to Li's plans, and for a time *Hung-ch'i* became truly the prime instrument for the transmittal of Central policies, taking the place of Central circulars. It acted as a channel of information and instructions directly from party headquarters in Shanghai to party leaders and the rank and file in the field. The development of Li's ideas between early March and the June 11 resolution, when his policy was adopted formally by the Central Politburo, is contained, as far as can be determined, only in the "national" paper *Hung-ch'i*. They do not appear in Central circulars, which contain only statements on routine party matters.

### *Theory Follows Practice*

Over the next few months, solely in *Hung-ch'i*, Li Li-san began to develop a conceptual framework to support the strategic plan outlined in Central Circular No. 70. In general, Li attempted to develop three major propositions: First, that an initial victory in one or several provinces was contingent upon a nationwide revolutionary situation; second, that while victory must be achieved by the full employment of all of the revolution's forces—peasant uprisings, Red Army attacks, troop rebellions, and so forth—the key to victory would be the proletarian struggle in major cities, which Li Li-san saw as the primary objectives; third, that the arrival of a direct revolutionary situation would be signaled by an outburst of the proletarian struggle in the large cities. Simultaneously, Li Li-san tried to show that these three propositions were in complete conformity with the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the CCP and the directives of the Comintern.

Regarding the first proposition, Li Li-san wrote a signed editorial in the March 26 issue of *Hung-ch'i* that the political resolution of the Sixth Congress of the CCP had read that "the degree of control of the reactionary rulers in the various areas is uneven, therefore, under a

<sup>6</sup> "Lieh ning chu i" (Leninism), *Hung-ch'i*, March 8, 1930, editorial, p. 1.



general new high tide there can be an initial revolutionary victory in one or more important provinces.”<sup>7</sup> Li Li-san interpreted this quotation to mean that “when a revolutionary high tide has arrived *over the entire country*, we will not be able to establish victorious revolutionary political power over the whole nation simultaneously, but first must establish it in one or several provinces.”<sup>8</sup>

Li Li-san’s interpretation of the quotation is plausible, but only when the context is ignored. The preceding sentence in the Sixth Congress’ political resolution, which Li did not quote, makes his excerpt clear. It reads, “a revolutionary high tide in one or several provinces and a future Soviet government is possible,”<sup>9</sup> meaning that the Chinese Communists should look toward a revolutionary high tide in a few provinces—not over the entire country—and to a partial victory in these provinces. Li Li-san, however, extended the Comintern’s estimate to cover a revolutionary high tide over the whole of China. The establishment of this proposition was essential to Li’s subsequent theoretical argument. It was certainly not what the Comintern had instructed.

If Li Li-san accepted the Comintern formulation of a high tide in one or several provinces it would mean, in effect, emphasis on South China. This was where the Communist movement was strongest at the moment, and where it had been strong ever since its inception. It was also where Mao Tse-tung was entrenched, and was fully five-hundred miles from Shanghai and CCP headquarters. Therefore, if Li Li-san acted on the Comintern thesis, a victory in South China could conceivably result in the establishment of a soviet government independent of Central headquarters and not necessarily under Li Li-san’s control. On the other hand, if a nationwide revolutionary high tide could be expected, it would give Li greater latitude in choosing where a revolution would begin and, in case of victory, the location of the new soviet government—not necessarily in South China. Indeed, Li Li-san had pointed out the Wuhan area as the center of attack in Central Circular No. 70 on

<sup>7</sup> Li Li-san, “Chün pei chien li ke ming ti cheng ch’üan” (Prepare to Establish Revolutionary Political Power), *Hung-ch’i*, March 26, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.

<sup>9</sup> *I sheng huo chi sheng ke ming kao ch’ao yü su wei ai cheng ch’üan te ch’ien t’u shih k’e neng te*, from “Chung kuo kung ch’an tang ti liu tz’u ch’üan kuo ta hui cheng chih chüeh i an” (Political Resolution of the Sixth Congress of the CCP), sec. 11, No. 4. See also Conrad Brandt, Benjamin I. Schwartz, and John Fairbank, *Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, p. 143.

February 26, 1930, and had already ordered Communist forces in the South to move northward early in that month with Circular No. 68.<sup>10</sup>

These may have been some of the reasons why, over the next few months, the full force of Li Li-san's arguments in *Hung-ch'i* was directed toward a substantiation of the proposition that everything depended on a nationwide revolutionary high tide. For example, on March 29 Li wrote in another signed editorial that on the basis of China's economic and political conditions a nationwide revolutionary high tide would first result in a victory in one or several provinces, "but an initial victory in one or several provinces cannot be separated from a nationwide revolutionary high tide."<sup>11</sup> On April 5 he continued in the same vein: "It must first be understood that an initial victory of political power in one or several provinces cannot be separated from a nationwide revolutionary high tide."<sup>12</sup>

On April 12, Li Li-san extended this proposition even further, bringing it dangerously close to Trotsky's concept of "permanent revolution." He argued that China was the world's greatest colony and supplier of world capitalism's raw materials. "Therefore," he maintained,

China is an inseparable part of the whole imperialist economic organization. . . . The success or failure of the Chinese revolution will not only be decided by the strength of the great struggle of the proletariat, worker, and peasant toiling masses of China, but also by the strength of the struggle of the world proletariat. Similarly, the success or failure of the Chinese revolution must necessarily be decided by the success or failure of the world revolution. The victory of the Chinese revolution is necessarily bound to the victory of the world revolution. Without the victory of the world revolution there can be no guarantee of the maintenance of the victory of the Chinese revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Li maintained that not only was China an inseparable part of the imperialist system; it was the "weakest link" in that system. "Therefore, the initial outbreak of the world revolution is possible in China . . .

<sup>10</sup> See chap. v.

<sup>11</sup> Li Li-san, "Chün pei chien li ke ming cheng ch'üan yü wu ch'an chieh chi ti ling tao" (Prepare to Establish Revolutionary Political Power and Proletarian Leadership), *Hung-ch'i*, March 29, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Li Li-san, "Tsen yang chün pei to ch'ü i sheng yü chi sheng cheng ch'üan ti sheng li ti t'iao chien" (How to Prepare the Conditions for the Victorious Seizure of Political Power in One or Several Provinces), *Hung-ch'i*, April 5, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Li Li-san, "Chung kuo ke ming yü shih chieh ke ming" (The Chinese Revolution and the World Revolution), *Hung-ch'i*, April 12, 1930, p. 1.

which necessarily will lead to the beginning of the entire world revolution."<sup>14</sup> Much as Lenin had argued over a decade earlier, Li Li-san saw China as providing the "spark" that would ignite a world revolution. Finally, on April 23, Li went so far as to write that the victory of the Chinese revolution—the bourgeois-democratic revolution—would determine an immediate transition to the "socialist" revolution.<sup>15</sup>

Li Li-san's observation that the Chinese revolution could succeed only as a by-product of a world revolution was a lucid evaluation. Much less lucid was his conclusion that China would provide the spark for the outbreak of the world revolution—quite apart from his conclusion that such a world revolution could be successful.

As his second proposition, Li Li-san argued that a proletarian struggle in the large cities was just as necessary as a nationwide revolutionary situation. On March 29 he wrote: "Workers, peasants, soldiers, and the Red Army all must fight together to achieve this victory," but the working class, he added, must lead. "Without a widespread strike struggle, without general political strikes in key cities, we will not be able to win political power in one or several provinces."<sup>16</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Red Army is one of the main revolutionary forces. But to think of relying on the Red Army's forces alone to win political power in one or several provinces and to establish nationwide revolutionary power is an extremely erroneous viewpoint.<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis on the workers' struggle in key cities was much more than a reaffirmation of standard Marxist doctrine. The assertions that the Communist Party was the vanguard of the proletariat, that the proletarian struggle was primary, and so forth, were belaboring the obvious. Behind the rhetoric lay the all-important question of the leadership and direction of the Chinese Communist movement and its forces. That there were genuine differences between the points of view of Li Li-san and Mao Tse-tung is explicit in Li's statements in *Hung-ch'i*. On March 29 he argued that the view that holds that it is enough to rely on the Red Army alone "originates in a lack of faith in the strength of the

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Li Li-san, "Chien li cheng ch'üan yü ke ming chuan pien" (The Establishment of Political Power and the Revolutionary Transformation), *Hung-ch'i*, April 23, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Hung-ch'i*, March 29, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

working class at present, a pessimistic view of the workers' struggle. This view holds that 'now the revolution is developing unevenly, the countryside, especially the Red Army, is developing far more than the cities and has leaped ahead of the workers' movement.' Therefore, the viewpoint has formed that we should rely solely on the forces of the Red Army to win political power."<sup>18</sup> Clearly, this was not an abstract doctrinal discussion but a verbal attack labeling an opposing strategy as erroneous.

This argument was made repeatedly during March and April as the time for the May conference of soviet delegates drew near. "The strength of the great proletarian struggle," Li affirmed,

will decide whether we succeed or fail to win political power in one or several provinces. Without the key cities, productive areas, and especially a high tide of the strike movement . . . there can be no victory of political power in one or several provinces. To think of "encircling the city with the countryside," or of "relying on the Red Army alone to win key cities," is illusory, a definitely erroneous point of view.<sup>19</sup>

Li's third proposition was that the proletarian struggle in the key cities would signal the arrival of a revolutionary high tide. Two weeks before the scheduled opening of the May conference, Li Li-san raised the question of the outbreak of the revolution. Quoting the Sixth Congress of the CCP to the effect that only during a high tide would the propaganda slogan of armed uprising become a slogan for direct action, Li concluded that the question of the revolutionary high tide therefore had "great importance." His position was that there was no high tide at the moment, although there was definitely a revolutionary revival, daily approaching a revolutionary high tide. A high tide would have arrived, Li said, when the workers' movement in the key cities had reached its peak. Of course, wrote Li, a workers' general strike alone could not develop into a revolutionary high tide. Other factors ought to be operative as well, but given the elements of peasant uprisings, the expansion of the Red Army, increases in strength from Kuomintang and warlord troop defections and mutinies, combined with a serious crisis among the ruling factions of the Kuomintang—all of which, according to Li Li-san, already existed—then "if a great workers' struggle breaks out in produc-

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Hung-ch'i*, April 5, 1930, p. 1; see also *Hung-ch'i*, April 12 and 16.



tive areas and political centers it will quickly become a revolutionary high tide—a direct revolutionary situation.”<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the workers' struggle was to be the barometer gauging the development of the revolutionary situation in China. Li Li-san assumed that all other elements to begin a revolution were in readiness and all that was now necessary was for the workers' movement to reach its “peak.”

When the high tide of the workers' movement bursts forth in political and production centers and when the backward workers' masses all show a positive attitude toward the political struggle, this will be the sign that the high tide of the revolution has arrived.<sup>21</sup>

In the same article, Li Li-san criticized those who were pessimistic about the great potential of the workers' movement. “They do not deny the development of a revolutionary situation, but they feel that the workers' struggle is not as highly developed as the peasant struggle. This is true, but . . . they doubt that a revolutionary high tide is daily drawing closer. They feel that it will be difficult for the workers' struggle to reach an upsurge very quickly. This is an extremely dangerous rightist error.”<sup>22</sup> They had overlooked, Li said heatedly, one important fact. When a new revolutionary high tide would arrive, “mass organizations can be expanded rapidly from extremely small organizations to great organizations with hundreds of thousands of people; similarly, the party's organizations can also become mass organizations within a few days or a few weeks time.”<sup>23</sup>

Li Li-san was attempting to have his cake and eat it too. For the workers' movement to “burst forth” in mass strikes and uprisings assumed the existence of mass organizations. Yet Li was implying that the workers' movement could do this without the mass organizations pre-existing. They could, he said, be expanded once the high tide had arrived—a circular argument. In a very real sense, Li's boast that the workers' mass organizations could be expanded once the workers' movement had reached a high tide revealed the actual position of the Communists in the labor movement. Communist influence in the labor movement had indeed been great during the middle and late 1920's until the break with

<sup>20</sup> Li Li-san, “Lun ke ming kao ch'ao” (On the Revolutionary High Tide), *Hung-ch'i*, April 16, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

the Kuomintang, and the Communists' subsequent decline. They had never regained their former influence. Time and again, the party's internal reports exposed the weakness of their position in the workers' movement.<sup>24</sup> All of this made Li's claims about the revival of the workers' movement (at least Communist abilities to control this movement) seem dubious at best.

What lay behind the theoretical framework which Li Li-san had erected? Insisting on a "nationwide revolutionary high tide" as opposed to a "high tide in one or several provinces" allowed him a greater range of choice: first, in determining the focus of attack and second, in locating the revolutionary soviet government in the event of victory. Maintaining that the proletarian struggle was crucial to the development of the revolutionary movement, in addition to being perfectly orthodox doctrinally, allowed Li to focus on an urban target over which he exercised greater control and where he was stronger. Finally, using the workers' movement as a barometer of the entire revolutionary movement's degree of preparedness allowed Li Li-san to decide when a revolutionary outbreak would occur.

Throughout the spring of 1930, Li Li-san developed the theoretical framework that he hoped would allow him to justify his plan for an attempt to overthrow the Kuomintang regime. His propositions had little in common with the Comintern's policy as set forth at the Sixth Congress of the CCP and in subsequent directives. The Comintern had wanted activity in both city and countryside but emphasized the guerrilla war in the countryside. It had hoped for a partial victory in one or several provinces as a result of this effort and saw little chance for more than limited successes in the near future against the "minions of Chiang Kai-shek," who were entrenched in the cities. In the Comintern's over-all strategy the cities played an important diversionary role; they were the focus of Li Li-san's plans.

### *Final Preparations for the May Conference*

Li Li-san's preparations for the May conference of soviet delegates were nearly completed. The affair was to open in Shanghai on May 1 as a preparatory for a main conference to be held later in one of the soviet

<sup>24</sup> Chou En-lai, *Mu ch'ien chung kuo tang ti tzu chih wen t'i* (The Current Organizational Problems of the Chinese Party), 1929; *Hung-se wen-hsien*, the Comintern directive of Feb. 7, 1929, pp. 297-319, and *Kung tang nei mo i chi p'eng k'uei* (The Inside Story of the CCP and Its Collapse), p. 12.

areas.<sup>25</sup> Since the general call for the conference in early February, Li had received replies from several soviet leaders, but none from Mao Tse-tung, perhaps the one man whose presence was most needed by Li. In early April, Li sent a letter to the Fourth Army Front Committee, urging Mao to attend the conference.<sup>26</sup> In the same letter, Li instructed the Fourth Army to move northward along the Kan River toward Kiukiang, a city north of Nanchang, in accordance with his central strategy of positioning Communist forces in the Wuhan area.

By April, 1930, Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh had become the leaders of the most powerful single armed force in the Chinese Communist movement.<sup>27</sup> There could thus be little binding force to decisions reached at any conference of soviet delegates in which they did not participate, but there were other obvious reasons for desiring Mao's presence in Shanghai. For his plans to succeed, Li Li-san needed to come to some kind of arrangement with Mao Tse-tung. Li possibly intended to compel Mao to accept his Central leadership by a show of political strength at the conference, or failing that, to resort to more drastic measures. His objective in either case was to gain control over (from Li's point of view "to unify") the soviet movement.

At about this time several articles anticipating the opening of the conference of Chinese soviet delegates appeared in Communist publications, stressing both the need to unify the soviet movement and the pre-eminence of Mao Tse-tung among the leaders of the soviet movement. *International Press Correspondence* printed an article by a man named Kuo, discussing the coming conference. The rationale for calling a conference of soviet delegates at this time, he said, was the growing need to unify the movement.

The new characteristic feature of the guerrilla war is that the isolated and scattered forces are now being centralized and that the movement is extending to the more thickly populated districts, where there are railway lines and easy means of transport. The movement is even extending to the larger towns, although the big industrial centres . . . are not yet under Soviet rule. . . . [However,] it must be pointed out that for the present only towns are involved where the working class is

<sup>25</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti liu shih pa hao* (Central Circular No. 68) (hereafter cited as Central Circular No. 68).

<sup>26</sup> *Chung yang kei ssu chün ch'ien wei hsin* (Letter from the Central to the Fourth Army Front Committee), April 3, 1930.

<sup>27</sup> Smolov, "Nekotorye problemy partizanskogo . . .," p. 83.

represented by coolies and the workers of relatively small-scale factories without mechanical power.<sup>28</sup>

Two articles on the same subject also appeared in the journal *Communist International*.<sup>29</sup> The first, written by a man named Li—probably Li Li-san—included the general program of a soviet government, a labor law, an agrarian law, and a woman's law. If this article was written by Li Li-san (and it seems highly unlikely that the writer of an article on the "First Congress of Soviets," which included the texts of specific laws for passage by a congress to be held two months hence, was not the author of those laws) he seems to have had a purpose beyond that of simply announcing the coming conference. Most of the article was devoted to a laudatory account of the Red Army and its leaders, principally Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh. The author emphasized that the young Red Army was now a major force in the Chinese Communist movement, the "backbone of the future all-Chinese Red Army."<sup>30</sup>

The author went on to praise Mao Tse-tung in particular for his Hunan report of 1927 and congratulated him for having "chosen the correct" path at that time of retreating into the mountains after the failure of the Canton uprising.<sup>31</sup> The Red Army, he said,

. . . under the leadership of Comrade Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, has operated in the area joining the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung all during [the period following the Canton uprising]. In the course of two years the Nanking reactionaries have struggled unsuccessfully against these units. They have equipped three expeditions against them. The struggle of these units is indeed an heroic epic; without ammunition, money, or supplies, they fought against an enemy many times their superior. They hid in the mountains, staying for months at a time without interrupting revolutionary work. . . .<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Kuo, "On the First Congress of the Chinese Soviets," *Inprecor*, X, No. 28 (June 12, 1930), 509.

<sup>29</sup> Li, "I s'ezd soviety v Kitae" (The First Congress of Soviets in China), *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 9 (1930), pp. 8–14, and "Krestianskoe dvizhenie, partizanskaia borba i raiony sovetsoi vlasti v Kitae" (The Peasant Movement, Guerrilla Struggle, and Regions of Soviet Power in China), *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 15 (1930), pp. 40–48. The German language edition of issue No. 9 appeared on April 9, 1930. The Russian language edition probably came off the presses at about the same time.

<sup>30</sup> Li, "I s'ezd soviety v Kitae," p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. Oddly enough, there also appeared at this time the "obituary" of Mao Tse-tung (*Inprecor*, Vol. X, No. 14 [March 20, 1930]).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



The remainder of the article went on in the same vein, extolling the heroic deeds of the Red Army and especially those of its leaders. Other prominent leaders in the soviet movement were also mentioned—Ho Lung and Chao Yi-chün—but high praise was reserved for Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh. Such prominent leaders of the soviet movement could hardly fail to attend a conference held in their own behalf. Clearly, the most prominent of these, Mao and Chu, must attend. But the article is puzzling. It seems perfectly appropriate to have an article publicizing the coming conference and even naming key leaders in the soviet areas who were to participate in the conference until one discovers that Li Li-san had been trying for months to persuade Mao to attend the conference, and the fact that their relations had never been cordial. In this light, the article can be interpreted as a form of indirect pressure on Mao Tse-tung and other soviet leaders to attend by way of informing the leaders of the Comintern who should attend.

In a report by the CCP Central to the ECCI, the conference is again mentioned as a means of unifying the movement. The isolation of many soviet districts, it was said, had led to the feeling that the masses were not part of a larger movement.

That is why we have decided to call the first congress of soviet areas so that the peasantry will feel that the great masses are involved in the movement. In the area of legislation, it is necessary to study the experience of the older soviet areas, so that our policies will be united; this we can achieve by exchanging experience at the conference. There we can also realize the leadership of the working class in the peasant movement. We have invited as participants the General Federation of Labor, the workers from Canton, and the railroad workers from North China, so that the peasants will feel that not only the peasantry takes part of this movement, but the working class as well.<sup>33</sup>

Here again, the terms in which the conference was discussed were not inconsistent with the Comintern's basic line. There is no hint here that Communist forces were even then being ordered into position for a large-scale military encounter with the Nationalist regime.

Assuming that the article by "Li" and the article abstracted from the CCP Central Committee report to the ECCI were both written by Li Li-san (or by some member of his organization), an interesting hypothesis suggests itself. From the moment when Li Li-san proscribed some

<sup>33</sup> *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 15 (1930), pp. 47-48.

publications, consolidated others, and established *Hung-ch'i* as a "national" policy organ in early March, 1930, he had begun to play a double game. The evidence suggests that from early March—after Chou En-lai's departure—until early June, Li Li-san expounded the Comintern's policy in documents that the Comintern could inspect (Central circulars, letters to the ECCI, and articles published in international Communist publications) and at the same time developed his own policy line in *Hung-ch'i* and in secret orders to which the Comintern was unlikely to have ready access.

First, there is a marked difference in the subject matter of Central circulars after the appearance of Central Circular No. 70 in late February, 1930. Before this time, major policy statements usually appeared first in Central circulars, as in Circulars No. 60 of December, 1929, No. 68 of early February, 1930, and No. 70 of late February. Some, like Circular No. 60, were later carried in *Hung-ch'i*, but newspapers were generally reserved for republishing important policy statements. Their main function was as a vehicle for Communist propaganda among the masses. However, during the all-important period between the publication of Circular No. 70 in late February and the closing of the May conference in early June, no policy statements are found in Central circulars. Li's policy statements appear solely in *Hung-ch'i* in the form of signed editorials and articles, which were not republications from Central circulars. Only after the close of the May conference and passage of the June 11 resolution, when Li Li-san had obtained the necessary agreement for his policy from the Central Committee, did he resume the former practice of publishing important policy statements in Central circulars (as well as continuing to write important pieces in *Hung-ch'i*).<sup>34</sup>

Second, Li Li-san's positions on guerrilla warfare and on Mao Tse-tung are consistent with the hypothesis of a double game. In *Communist International*, "Li" protested "against underestimating the significance of the guerrilla war,"<sup>35</sup> and praised Mao highly.<sup>36</sup> Yet, Li Li-san's relations with Mao were anything but friendly. In *Hung-ch'i*, Li excor-

<sup>34</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti pa shih erh hao* (Central Circular No. 82), July 22, 1930, appears to be the first major policy statement distributed in this form since early March.

<sup>35</sup> "Krestianskoe dvizhenie, partizanskaia borba . . .," p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Li, "I s'ezd soviety v Kitae," pp. 9-10.

iated Mao's policy of "encircling the city with the countryside,"<sup>37</sup> and railed against the "guerrilla concept"<sup>38</sup> as one of the main factors hindering the party's progress at this time.

Third, the excerpt from the Central Committee report to the ECCI was a concise restatement of Comintern policy as formulated at the Ninth Plenum and Sixth Congress of the CCP. In *Hung-ch'i*, on the other hand, during the period from February to June, 1930, a diametrically opposite policy was put forth. The article in *Communist International*, which closely paraphrased the Sixth CCP resolution on the organization of soviet power,<sup>39</sup> said:

In the soviet areas the peasant organizations have already lost their significance; there, all questions are settled by the soviet. Where only unions of hired hands are established in the beginning of the revolutionary struggle, there we organize peasant committees composed of representatives of the peasant unions, guerrilla detachments, and so forth. In areas where the guerrilla struggle has just begun, the peasant unions are already found underground. . . . In the resolutions of the Sixth CCP Congress we spoke about the possibility of creating soviets only under conditions of an upsurge of the mass movement. Therefore, when there still is no mass movement [in a particular district] we organize only peasant committees chosen or elected by peasant unions or trade unions. This stage is a necessary transition stage to the organization of soviet power.<sup>40</sup>

In Central circulars 68 and 70, and in letters to the Red Army, Li Li-san urged the expansion of the Red Army and its movement northward and toward China's major cities.<sup>41</sup> He emphasized the urban struggle over the rural, the reverse of what is found above.<sup>42</sup> He attempted to manufacture "an upsurge of the mass movement" where, in fact, it seemed doubtful that conditions that could be termed an upsurge or a "high tide" existed.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the tedious process of expansion

<sup>37</sup> Li Li-san, "Tsen yang chun pei to ch'ü . . .," *Hung-ch'i*, April 5, 1930, p. 1. See also "Resolutions on Some Historical Questions," *Mao Tse-tung hsüan-chi*, III, 962.

<sup>38</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti ch'i shih hao* (Central Circular No. 70), sec. 4, Nos. 2, 4 (hereafter cited as Central Circular No. 70).

<sup>39</sup> See chap. ii.

<sup>40</sup> "Krestianskoe dvizhenie, partizanskaia borba . . .," pp. 45-46.

<sup>41</sup> Central Circulars No. 68 and 70; *Chung yang kei ssu chün* . . . (Letter to Fourth Army Front Committee).

<sup>42</sup> *Hung-ch'i*, March 29, p. 1; April 5, p. 1; April 12, p. 1; April 16, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, April 16, p. 1; Central Circular No. 70.

and consolidation of area after area, region after region, Li advocated a grand offensive that would lead quickly to a nationwide revolution.<sup>44</sup> The whole import of the excerpt quoted above is on gradual expansion in the countryside, while Li's emphasis in his writings was on large-scale attacks by the Red Army on large and important cities like Shanghai, Changsha, Nanchang, Harbin, Canton, and centering around Wuhan. From all of this one is led to the conclusion that Li Li-san attempted to lead the Comintern into thinking that he was faithfully executing the policy formulated at the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928 (to offset the credibility of Chou En-lai's report to the Comintern?), while he laid the groundwork for his own position. If this, in fact, was Li Li-san's scheme it was extraordinarily well conceived, but nonetheless risky. Although the Comintern received the Chinese press, such as *Hung-ch'i*, just as it received the more important Politburo circulars and letters, there was an understandably greater time lag between publication in China and reception in Moscow of what was, after all, the party's propaganda material, than between the promulgation and reception of important Politburo documents. In the *Bulletin of the Scientific-Research Institute on China* where surveys of the Chinese Communist press were published, it is clear that such press information as the Comintern received was from three to six months behind the events taking place in China.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps equally important was the fact that the CI representative did not understand Chinese, which made it very difficult for him to learn of Li's plans.<sup>46</sup>

Having been involved in communications and publications operations for several years, Li Li-san could be expected to know fairly well how much leeway he could count on. If he played his hand carefully, he probably felt that he might well be able to enact his policies before the Comintern became fully aware of his plans and could do anything to stop him. Only by presenting Moscow with a successful *fait accompli*—a resounding victory of the Chinese revolution—could he hope to escape Stalin's wrath for disobeying his instructions. The "double game" would not be required much longer. Once he had obtained general acceptance

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, and "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t'ao lun" (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san line), *Pu-erh-se-wei-k'e* (Bolshevik) IV, No. 3 (May 10, 1931), 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Biulleten Nauchno-issledovatel'skovo instituta po Kitaiu* . . . , No. 1, Jan. 26, 1930, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> For a graphic example of this, see chap. ix, p. 197.



of his plans at the conference of soviet delegates, it would no longer be necessary to conceal them from Moscow, for there would then be little the Comintern could do in the short run to prevent the activation of Li's plans.

### *Growing Opposition to Li's Plans*

There was yet no word from Mao Tse-tung, and by the end of April Li had become alarmed. In still another letter (not circular) from the Central Committee, he urged Mao to attend the conference.<sup>47</sup> "Events" (see below) had moved so rapidly, Li said, that it was imperative for Mao to come to Shanghai even if he arrived late at the conference. His presence was needed to determine a new role for the Red Army—a role too important to be discussed by letter. Li repeated that several invitations already had been sent to Mao but no replies had been received. He closed by assuring Mao that the Red Army would be in good hands during his absence, appointing Chu Teh commander of Red forces in Kiangsi.

May 1 arrived and passed with no word from Mao Tse-tung. Li Li-san postponed the conference. How could he hold it without the presence of the leader of the single most powerful Communist force in China? Mao's silence was premeditated. The previous month in distant Juichin, Kiangsi, he had come to a decision that, I believe, was directly related to his refusal to reply to Li Li-san.<sup>48</sup> Mao and Chu Teh had decided to carry out their own plans rather than follow Li's orders to move Communist forces northward or, it seems, to attend the conference of soviet delegates. At Juichin, where the "main forces of the Red Army" were located, Mao and Chu decided to remain in South China, moving from southern Kiangsi to Fukien—that is, east of the Kan River. At the same time, P'eng Teh-huai, who also attended the Juichin meeting, was to operate with his Third Army forces on the Kiangsi-Hunan border—far to the west of the Kan.<sup>49</sup>

Li Li-san postponed the opening of the conference for thirty days; by the end of May it could be delayed no longer. Opposition from groups within the party had mounted the more apparent it became that Li's

<sup>47</sup> *Chung yang kei ssu chün* . . . (Letter to the Fourth Army Front Committee). See also Hsiao, *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934*, pp. 16-18, for a paraphrase of this letter.

<sup>48</sup> Snow, *Red Star over China*, p. 179.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

line did not accurately reflect Comintern directives. The Ho Meng-hsiung faction, which had taken issue with the Li Li-san leadership over party policy as early as the second Kiangsu provincial conference in the spring of 1930, had become more and more vociferous.<sup>50</sup> Ho had first joined the Communist movement in North China, where he was a labor organizer. From 1927 on, he had been a member of the Kiangsu provincial committee,<sup>51</sup> and from the time of the Sixth Congress of the CCP had been secretary of the Shanghai Party's Central and Eastern sections.<sup>52</sup>

The students who were sent back from the Soviet Union (the twenty-eight Bolsheviks), had also begun to put pressure on the Li Li-san leadership, criticizing Li's writings in *Hung-ch'i* from late March—soon after their arrival in China.<sup>53</sup> This group, led by Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming) and including Wang Chia-hsiang, Ch'in Pang-hsien, Ho Tzu-shu, Shen Tse-min and others, had been studying at Sun Yat-sen Academy in Moscow since 1926. According to Li's subsequent recollection, it was when he first "formulated the thesis of the revolutionary upsurge that [Ch'en] Shao-yü immediately opposed this erroneous viewpoint and struggled against it until the promulgation of the June resolution."<sup>54</sup> (Li had first formulated the thesis in *Hung-ch'i* of March 29 and later expanded it in the April 16 issue in an editorial, "On the Revolutionary High Tide.")<sup>55</sup>

Pressure of a different sort came from Mao Tse-tung, who remained aloof with his armed forces in South China. At the end of May, when the conference was about to open, Mao was still some five hundred miles away. He was at Tingchow, in southwestern Fukien,<sup>56</sup> making plans for continued operations of the Red Army in that area, as he had decided the previous month at Juichin. His failure to attend the conference, or even to reply to repeated entreaties from Li Li-san, was indirect opposition to Li's plans, or, as Li Ang has put it, "*yang feng yin wei*"—out-

<sup>50</sup> Ho Meng-hsiung *i chien-shu* (Statement of Views of Ho Meng-hsiung) Part I, sec. 3, *et passim*.

<sup>51</sup> Mao Tse-tung *hsüan-chi*, III, 1000, n. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ho Meng-hsiung, Part II; see also Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> [Wang] T'ieh-chang, "Fan-tui Li-san lu-hsien tou cheng ti ching kuo" (The Story of the Struggle against the Li-san Line), *Tang ti chien she* (Reconstruction of the Party), No. 3 (Feb. 15, 1931), p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Li Li-san, "Li Li-san t'ung chih lai hsin" (Letter from Comrade Li Li-san), *Tou-cheng* (Struggle), No. 14 (May 28, 1932), p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Hung-ch'i*, March 29 and April 16, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 274.

ward obedience, actual disobedience.<sup>57</sup> Li hoped to offset or to compensate for these negative factors in the party by obtaining a strong show of support for his policies at the conference.

Aside from internal party pressure, the factor that convinced Li Li-san that the conference could be delayed no longer was the possible loss of what was—from Li's point of view—a golden opportunity. Armed conflict had broken out between Chiang Kai-shek and the warlords that threatened to upset the Nationalist government. On April 3, Yen Hsi-shan declared war on Chiang Kai-shek, simultaneously naming Feng Yü-hsiang and Li Tsung-jen as his deputy commanders.<sup>58</sup> Chang Fa-kuei also joined this group. From April 5 on, the insurgent coalition converged on Chiang from three directions. Yen himself moved forces southward from Hopeh (Chihli) into Shantung. Feng advanced eastward from Shensi into northern Honan, and Chang moved northward toward Changsha from his base in Canton.<sup>59</sup> Their plan was to crush Chiang in a gigantic pincer movement. By late May the insurgents' forces were preparing to close on Chiang along a front stretching from Tsinan in Shantung province to Changsha in Hunan. Chang Fa-kuei's troops had reached Changsha and Yen Hsi-shan's forces were nearing Tsinan.

At this point, the defeat of the insurgent coalition was by no means certain. The actual balance of forces lay with the rebels, although Chiang's forces appeared, on paper, to be superior. The reason for this was that Chang Hsüeh-liang, who had been named commander of Chiang's forces, had not yet actually committed any of his own troops to the conflict. By late May, 1930, Chiang's position was rather precarious.

These appear to have been the "events" to which Li Li-san referred in his urgent letter to Mao Tse-tung in late April.

<sup>57</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai*, p. 161.

<sup>58</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Survey of International Affairs, 1930*, p. 558.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

# 7 / The Adoption of the Li Li-san Line

The period from the opening of the first conference of delegates from soviet areas on May 31, 1930, to the adoption of the June 11 resolution marks a major turning point in the history of the Li Li-san leadership. The resolutions adopted by the May conference and, eleven days later, by the Central Politburo, form the basis of the policy carried out by the CCP during the next several months, which saw the activation and failure of the "Li Li-san line." The policy called for attacks on large cities by the Red Army, strikes leading to insurrection in key cities, local uprisings throughout the countryside, and troop mutinies in Kuomintang military units to thwart their efforts at defense. In contemporary military terminology, Li Li-san seems to have attempted to move from the stage of defensive guerrilla warfare to one of offensive mobile or positional warfare. His objective was the overthrow of the Nationalist government and the establishment of an urban-based Chinese Communist regime.

## *The May Conference of Delegates from Soviet Areas*

The conference of delegates from soviet areas (*su tai hui*), was finally convened on May 31, in Shanghai.<sup>1</sup> Called jointly by the CCP and the

<sup>1</sup> Victor Yakhontoff, *The Chinese Soviets*, p. 127, and "Materialy konferentsii predstavitelei Sovetskikh raionov Kitaia" (Materials of the Conference of Repre-



All-China Federation of Labor (a Communist front organization), it was reportedly attended by representatives from the soviet areas of Fukien, Kiangsi, Kwangtung, Kwangsi, Hupeh, and Hunan. In addition, delegates from the Red Army and guerrilla units, representatives from the Communist-led unions in centers of heavy industry, such as Shanghai, Nanking, and Wuhan, as well as delegates from Chinese Communist Youth organizations and others, were apparently on hand.<sup>2</sup>

The May conference, as the conference of delegates from soviet areas will be called, was originally planned as a preparatory conference for the first All-China Congress of Soviets to be held on November 7, 1930,<sup>3</sup> the third anniversary of the Canton Soviet.<sup>4</sup> The preparatory conference presumably was to work out an agenda for the formal congress—to outline the main problems to be considered, submit drafts of laws, a political program, and a general policy. Its function was to provide the raw materials from which the formal congress could work out a program for the projected establishment of a “soviet” government.

Although the preparatory conference would be important, it would not have a policy-making function. The first formal All-China Congress of Soviets, to meet later in one of the soviet areas,<sup>5</sup> was to determine policy for the soviet movement as a whole. Perhaps for the very reason that the formal congress was to be held in one of the soviet areas and not in Shanghai, his stronghold, Li Li-san abruptly turned the preparatory conference into a formal one shortly before it convened. Hsiang Chung-fa gives an account of this peremptory move.

Originally, the soviet delegates' conference was to be a preparatory conference, but suddenly it was transformed into a formal conference (at this time I was ill and Hsiao Kuan came to me one night and told me). There had been no detailed research, the decision had been made haphazardly.<sup>6</sup>

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sentatives of Soviet Regions of China) (hereafter cited as *May Conference Materials*). A. S. Perevertailo *et al.*, *Ocherki istorii Kitaia v noveishee vremia*, p. 222, says that the conference opened on May 30.

<sup>2</sup> *May Conference Materials*, p. 172; Yakhontoff, *The Chinese Soviets*, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Perevertailo, *Ocherki istorii Kitaia v noveishee vremia*, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> See below, n. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *May Conference Materials*, p. 172; *Chung yang t'ung kao ti liu shih pa hao* (Central Circular No. 68).

<sup>6</sup> *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting), Nov. 22, 1930, leaf 41. See also Hsiang Chung-fa's *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo Report), sec. 2, p. 4.

This change had great significance. In the struggle to gain control over the soviet movement, convening a formal conference in Shanghai instead of in a distant soviet area (which was likely to be controlled by Mao Tse-tung) meant that in all likelihood the policy adopted at Shanghai would be Li Li-san's policy. Mao Tse-tung, adopting the only means feasible at the time to oppose Li Li-san, neither attended the conference, nor sent delegates to Shanghai, nor acknowledged the many letters from the CCP Central urging him to come to the conference. Li Li-san knew that Moscow was aware of his plans and that his time for relative freedom of action was growing short. Coupled with the prospect of making a great victory while the Kuomintang warlords were engaged in internecine warfare, these were undoubtedly the main factors that convinced him that this was the moment to act. Finally, a "packed" conference would serve to gain at least the appearance of party support for his policy.

#### *The Resolutions of the May Conference*

The conference opened on May 31 and closed on the third or fourth of June, 1930. Five resolutions were "adopted": a political resolution (the most important), a provisional land law, a labor law, a special resolution on the defense of the U.S.S.R., and a manifesto about the first All-China Soviet Congress to be held on November 7 of that year.<sup>7</sup> The political resolution contained an analysis of the current situation and laid down a new policy line. Section 3 of that resolution was a restatement of Li Li-san's views, with certain exceptions, as he had expressed them in the party paper *Hung-ch'i* over the preceding three months. It bears restating that although the Comintern's name was invoked by Li Li-san, none of its directives permit the interpretation of policy set forth in this document.

It is true that the first two sections of the political resolution, "Two Class Camps and Two Powers" and the "Program of the Soviet Government," did generally follow earlier Comintern analyses of China; but this was as far as the political resolution went in resembling a Comintern view. In sections 1 and 2, it was stated that there were only two camps in

<sup>7</sup> *May Conference Materials*, p. 196. The Russian commentary on the documents asserts that the congress was to be held on December 11 (p. 172), not November 7, and that the Chinese had erred. The Russians wanted the congress to coincide with the anniversary of the Canton revolt; the Chinese believed it should coincide with the anniversary of the Russian revolution.

China—the Kuomintang-Imperialist camp and the workers' and peasants' soviet camp. There could be no third camp. Only the victory of Soviet China could liberate the oppressed masses.<sup>8</sup>

In section 3, Li Li-san's views were interpolated into the analysis. In "The Current Revolutionary Situation and the Perspectives of the Soviet Areas," it was asserted that "objective" conditions were ripe for an attempt to overthrow the Nationalist government. The position of the Kuomintang-Imperialist camp, he said, was rapidly disintegrating, while the revolutionary camp was daily growing stronger.

However, the more rapid expansion of the soviet areas is dependent not only upon a high leap of the revolutionary wave in China [*vysokim vzletom revoliutsionnoi volny*], but on a deepening of the world revolution and on the presence of a direct revolutionary situation. Therefore, the development of soviets depends upon a deepening of the agrarian revolution, which simultaneously is inseparably linked with a revolutionary situation.<sup>9</sup>

China, the resolution read, had become the focus of the deepening world crisis of imperialism. It was "one of the points of direct conflict of imperialism with the U.S.S.R. and of the most fierce internecine conflicts of the imperialists." The Chinese revolution would be the spark that would ignite the world revolution, since "in China are the weakest links in the chain of world-wide imperialist power."<sup>10</sup>

There is a rapid growth of the revolutionary crisis now in China; an important role is played in this by the prolonged militarist war, which intensifies the general political and economic crisis in the country and speeds up the development of the mass revolutionary struggle. . . . In a word, everything confirms the speedy development of the revolution and the proximity of the revolutionary wave—a direct revolutionary situation.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the resolution continued, the objective conditions for revolution were speedily ripening to create the possibility of a revolutionary explosion at the slightest provocation. It would be the "deepest unpardonable error" to suppose that the revolutionary upsurge was separated from the CCP by an unbridgeable gulf, or that it was still hidden in the distant future.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177–79.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

The resolution went on to state that China's economic backwardness and political disintegration indicated the necessity for an initial victory in one or several provinces. "It follows that preparations for a victory beginning in one or several provinces and the establishment of an all-China revolutionary power become the central problems of the present." Then followed, "An initial victory in one or several provinces cannot be separated from a revolutionary upsurge over the entire country under the leadership of the proletariat."<sup>12</sup> In acknowledging that a nationwide uprising would undoubtedly meet with the fierce attack of imperialism, the gentry-bourgeois Kuomintang, and the militarists, who, especially for this, would forget their disagreements and join forces, it continued:

This will be the beginning of a merciless war, which at first will be internal and then international. Therefore, in order to guarantee a genuine victory in one or several provinces, it is necessary first of all to attend to preparations for armed uprisings of the working classes and the coordination of this work all over China. . . . This will permit us to move very quickly from a victory in one or several provinces to a complete victory of soviet power in all of China. If the revolution does not gain a victory over all of China, then imperialism, the Kuomintang, and the landlords will join all of their forces to suppress the soviet regions and the latter, rolling in their own blood, will not be able to hold out for long. To think that the soviet regions must preserve their conquests over the course of a prolonged period of time without a victory of the revolution over the entire country is a great mistake. The soviets are one of the main forces of the Chinese revolution and their task is not to limit themselves only to the preservation of their own territory . . . but to expand themselves over entire China, having in view the victory of the revolution over the entire country. There is especially the possibility that this task can be achieved now at the moment of the proximity of the revolutionary upsurge and the ripening of the preconditions for the victory of the revolution in China. The soviet regions, no matter what, must strive for a victory of the revolution in China and for the sovietization of the entire country.<sup>13</sup>

The main task of the soviet regions would be "to concentrate all armed forces in the Red Army. . . . The present strategy of the Red Army consists in decisively attacking the enemy with the aim of exterminating his main forces and in advancing toward major centers and means

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



of communications.”<sup>14</sup> The former guerrilla tactics of avoiding decisive battles, shunning clashes with the main forces of the enemy, and carrying on scattered guerrilla warfare were not considered in keeping with the then current situation and the resolution remarked that they should be radically changed.

The political resolution set forth Li Li-san's view that “everything confirms the speedy development of the revolution and the proximity of the revolutionary wave—a direct revolutionary situation.”<sup>15</sup> The main task was to prepare for a victory in one or several provinces, but this was seen to be inseparable from a nationwide victory. It expressed the belief that a nationwide victory was necessary to preserve a victory in one or several provinces; unless the “Kuomintang-Imperialist camp” were completely overthrown, the “soviet camp” would not be strong enough to survive the former's counterattack. Victory, the resolution acknowledged, would depend to a large extent upon the Red Army, which must be reorganized into a mighty striking force. The former guerrilla strategy was to be abolished.

As the conference was on the soviet areas, the principal policy measures set forth were those concerned with the soviets and the Red Army. Policy for the workers in urban areas was set forth elsewhere (in the June 11 resolution). Similarly, the labor and land laws adopted at the conference were intended primarily for application in the soviets and the Red Army. The provisions of the labor law, however, calling for a strict eight-hour day, limitation of working hours for children, and full pay for all of several revolutionary holidays, could be enacted in town as well as in the country. The last provision indicates the true objective of the law. Holidays with pay were to be February 7 (to commemorate the blood shed by the workers in the Peking-Hankow railroad incident), May 1 (“labor” day), December 11 (the Canton uprising), and other local revolutionary holidays.<sup>16</sup> For the Nationalists to accept such demands would be to accept the revolutionary propaganda and to admit the “heroism” of those bent on overthrowing their state.

The land law advocated the execution of certain original measures not

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “Lao tung pao hu fa” (Labor Protection Law), *Hung-ch'i*, June 4, 1930, p. 3.

heretofore found in Communist land laws.<sup>17</sup> Purchase, sale, rent, and mortgage of land were proscribed to prevent, it stated, the "rise of a new gentry." In addition, to avoid a decrease in production after confiscation, large-scale farms were not to be broken down and redistributed as plots. Rather, collective farms and collective working of these large farms were to be implemented.<sup>18</sup> Collective farms were not to be organized everywhere, only in the special cases of pre-existing large farms. (Later, Li Li-san would be criticized for these measures on the grounds that he had sought to introduce socialist conditions prematurely.)

Policy toward the kulak, or rich peasant, was seemingly ambiguous. In section 1b it was stated that "all kulak land, except that which is worked by him . . . will be confiscated,"<sup>19</sup> implying that the kulak could retain all land that he himself worked. Section 3b, however, narrowed this clause considerably, stating that "all land of counterrevolutionary kulaks must be confiscated."<sup>20</sup> It was not to be enough for a kulak to prove that he worked all the land that he owned; it was to be necessary to convince the Communists that he was not "counterrevolutionary," something only the Communists would decide. The law appears to have been designed to persuade the uncommitted kulak element to join forces with the Communists.

Several principles were to be observed in the distribution of land. Local cadres would decide which principles were appropriate in each specific case. First, all land in a given locality could be distributed equally, or, second, only confiscated land could be redistributed. In the latter case, peasants to whom land had already been distributed would not be forced to relinquish their plots so that all land involved could be redistributed. Furthermore, land was to be distributed according to the two subprinciples of population or labor power. If the Communists' objective in a given area was to gain the support of the people and to create a favorable impression, land would be distributed to everyone; if the objective was to maintain or to increase production it would be

<sup>17</sup> See Hsiao Tso-liang, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934*, for a close textual analysis of the various Communist land laws during this period.

<sup>18</sup> "T'u ti chan hsing fa" (Provisional Land Law), *Hung-ch'i*, June 4, 1930, p. 3, sec. 5c.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1b, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3b, p. 2.

distributed to those who could work, but not to the very young, the aged, or infirm.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the allotment of land to soldiers of the Red Army, the land law stipulated that those who had already received land were to keep it, while those who had not yet received allotments were to wait until the establishment of a national soviet government.<sup>22</sup>

The conference also promulgated a resolution on the defense of the U.S.S.R. It contained another possible justification for Li's developing "line." It read:

The counterrevolutionary Kuomintang under the leadership of imperialism has become the vanguard for an attack against the U.S.S.R.; the conflict arising over the CER is clear proof of this. At the present moment, if one looks on the surface, it seems as if the question of the CER is resolved, but in fact the imperialists and the Kuomintang are preparing to carry out a broad attack on the U.S.S.R. During the offensive war of the imperialists and the Kuomintang against the U.S.S.R., the worker and peasant masses of China must join in the defense of the U.S.S.R. and by class struggle within the country answer the attacks against the U.S.S.R.<sup>23</sup>

The implication here was that the Kuomintang was planning an imminent attack on the Soviet Union and that when the attack began the forces of the CCP, the "worker and peasant masses," would come to the aid of the Soviet Union by attacking the Kuomintang! This extraordi-

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5b, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5g. On the issue of distributing land to soldiers of the Red Army, Hsiao Tso-liang, *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934*, p. 19, sees a difference in the political resolution of the May conference and the provisional land law adopted by that same conference, the former advocating that land should be given to soldiers now and the latter stating that land would not be given until after the establishment of a Soviet government. Two points should be made here: first, it seems that the "excerpt" of the political resolution contained in *Hung-ch'i* (June 4, 1930, p. 2) bears little resemblance to the actual political resolution of the May conference (see *May Conference Materials*, pp. 176-88). Thus it is not quite the excerpt it purports to be. In fact, the proposition that land should be given to Red Army soldiers is not contained in the political resolution. Second, even if the "excerpted" version contained in *Hung-ch'i* were correct, the two would not be contradictory. The excerpt, as I read it, refers to soldiers of the warlords, while the provisional land law refers specifically to soldiers of the Red Army. The Communists' intention seems to have been to offer land to the soldiers of the warlords in return for their guns and to prevent the Red Army soldiers from succumbing to any temptation to make the reverse trade. After the victorious revolution, of course, the Red Army soldiers would receive land.

<sup>23</sup> *May Conference Materials*, p. 194.

nary resolution had enough foundation in fact to make it plausible. Moscow had instructed the Chinese Communists to increase their military activity at the time of the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis, which Li mentioned. At that time Moscow needed agitation by the CCP to prevent the Kuomintang from shifting its forces northward. At this time, some six months later, there was no such directive from the Comintern. There was no "crisis" over the Chinese Eastern Railway in June, 1930; Li Li-san had patently invented one. True, there was a conflict ensuing between the Kuomintang and a coalition of insurgent warlords. When Li Li-san did begin his plan to topple the Nationalist government he could conceivably point to this conflict as being the opening phase "for an attack against the U.S.S.R. . . ." <sup>24</sup>

### *Proceedings of the May Conference*

Li Li-san did not obtain unanimous agreement for his policies at the May conference, but his opposition was disunited and outnumbered. He encountered the most difficulty from two groups, which were, however, mutually opposed: the Ho Meng-hsiung faction and the Russian returned students. Ho Meng-hsiung was a powerful leader in the Communist labor movement, whose strength was centered in the youth organizations and trade unions of the large and sprawling party organization of Shanghai. His followers were also influential in the industrial areas of Kiangsu and to a lesser extent in Shantung, Honan, and Kwangtung.<sup>25</sup> In Shanghai alone, Ho's supporters were strong in five of the seven party sections there—the north, south, east, west, and central sections.<sup>26</sup>

Prominent men of the Ho faction in the Kiangsu provincial party organization were Wang K'e-ch'üan and Wang Feng-fei.<sup>27</sup> Other supporters included Lin Yu-nan, an important leader in Kiangsu and cousin of Lin Piao;<sup>28</sup> Yang Kuo-hua, a trade-union leader; Sun Che-yi, leader in railroad activities; Ch'en Yü, party youth organization liaison; Tai Hsiao-yün, member of (Kiangsu?) Youth Central; Han Lin-fu, leader in

<sup>24</sup> The conference materials also included an announcement of the coming Congress of Soviets (see below, p. 151).

<sup>25</sup> *Kung tang nei mo i chi p'eng k'uei* (The Inside Story of the CCP and Its Collapse), pp. 30–31 (hereafter cited as *Secret*).

<sup>26</sup> See chap. iii.

<sup>27</sup> *Secret*.

<sup>28</sup> Chang Kuo-t'ao, correspondence with the author. Chang also maintained that Ho and Lin Yu-nan were important supporters of his. See also Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , pp. 53, 68.



"northern affairs"; and Lu Hsün, chairman of the left-wing writers' league.<sup>29</sup> Probably not all of these men attended the conference.

Ho's actions at the May conference may appear more comprehensible after a brief description of his prior relations with the Li Li-san leadership. In February, 1930, Li Li-san had successfully begun to undermine the position of the Ho Meng-hsiung faction in the Shanghai party organization. He first set up a "Red vanguard" in Ho's district in Shanghai.<sup>30</sup> It was accorded full power (*wan neng*), superseding the authority of existing party organizations in the area. The youth organization was also abolished.<sup>31</sup> Ho himself was not formally dismissed from his posts; the ground was slowly cut from under him.<sup>32</sup> The result was that Li's organization, in conjunction with this and other moves made in the area,<sup>33</sup> seems to have gained a firm grip on the Shanghai party apparatus.

At the May conference, Ho attempted to recoup some of his lost ground. He made several proposals aimed at strengthening the workers' role in the party and, indirectly, his own. Ho agreed with Li's proposal to expand the Red Army but called it "inadequate under present circumstances."<sup>34</sup> He urged that the party's political leadership in the Red Army be strengthened by increasing the number of workers in the Red Army and by arming workers rather than peasants.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, Ho believed that the party was composed of too many peasants. Only 5 per cent of the party leaders were workers, and he wanted the party to "open its doors" to factory workers, railroad men, seamen, soldiers, and so forth, to correct the imbalance.<sup>36</sup>

Both of Ho's proposals seemed innocuous and, in themselves, they were; such proposals had had currency among the party leadership for years. Only in the larger context can their significance be appreciated. Both Li Li-san and Ho Meng-hsiung drew strength from the workers'

<sup>29</sup> *Secret*, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ho Meng-hsiung i chien shu* (Statement of Views of Ho Meng-hsiung), Part I, sec. 8. See also Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), *Wei chung kung keng chia pu erh se wei k'e hua erh tou cheng* (Struggle for the Further Bolshevization of the CCP), p. 138 (hereafter cited as *Further Bolshevization*).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> See *Shih-hua*, February 7, 1931, p. 1, and Hsiang Chung-fa (T'e Sheng), *Chung yang cheng chih chü kung tso pao kao* (Central Politburo Work Report).

<sup>34</sup> *Ho Meng-hsiung i chien shu*, Part I, sec. 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, sec. 10.

movement in the larger cities (a fact that makes analysis of their relationship especially difficult). It would seem that Ho's proposals would stand to benefit Li just as much as Ho. But Ho's additional proposals revealed that he had more in mind than a mere increase in the party's general welfare.

Ho argued that the establishment of the Red vanguard in his district of Shanghai was premature and should be the work of the Red Army in the future.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, he maintained, such Red vanguard units should be developed over the course of the struggle as mass organizations not as organs replacing local party authority. If, said Ho, the Red vanguards were mass organizations, then investigation committees (*chiu ch'a tui*) could be set up to bring the active and brave elements among the working masses into them.<sup>38</sup> Ho may have seen the investigation committees as a pathway by which he could increase his power, especially if he controlled them. But as long as the Red vanguards remained an elitist, supra-party, controlling organ in Li Li-san's hands, there was little Ho could do to regain his former strength.

Finally, Ho expressed his dismay at the *de facto* "elimination of the Communist youth organization in Shanghai."<sup>39</sup> He said that the ". . . role of the young workers in production and in the class struggle is increasing and their fighting ability has also increased. But the party has ignored this and, in fact, has liquidated the CY."<sup>40</sup> Ho demanded that the party re-establish the CY in Shanghai, establish CY cells in all factories, infuse the entire party organization with youth (*ch'ing nien hua*), and make a concentrated effort to win over the youth of China.<sup>41</sup>

Li Li-san's representation at the conference was too strong for Ho to obtain the acceptance of his key proposals, although his statements about worker control over the army and party were undoubtedly accepted, since they were in full accordance with Li's own views. At this time, however, the struggle between Ho and Li was limited to proposal and counterproposal. One unidentified observer termed their conflict a "battle of words and talk" [*wen tzu yü k'ou t'ou tou cheng*];<sup>42</sup> both propagandized against each other among the lower-level party members.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, sec. 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, sec. 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Secret*, sec. 5.

Li Li-san, after all, was the Moscow-chosen leader of the party, and opposition to him could only be engaged in surreptitiously. Later, when Li's plans showed signs of going awry, more serious and open conflict erupted between the two.<sup>43</sup>

The May conference also provided an opportunity for the returned students to intensify their criticism of Li Li-san's policies. They, like the Ho Meng-hsiung faction, had been opposed to the Li Li-san leadership for some months.<sup>44</sup> Shortly after their arrival, Li sent several of them, including Ch'en Shao-yü, to work under Ho Meng-hsiung in the Shanghai organization, where they wasted little time in developing opposition to Li Li-san's policies.<sup>45</sup> The primary mission of the returned students was to undermine Li's position in the party, perhaps in time to depose him.<sup>46</sup> Characteristically, just as Li was strengthening his own position in the Chinese party organization against internal rivals, the Comintern seems to have been employing the returned students to strengthen its own position vis-à-vis Li Li-san.<sup>47</sup>

The mere fact that the returned students opposed Li Li-san did not automatically assure them the support of the party rank and file, or, for that matter, of others opposing Li. Li had built up a substantial following that could not easily be offset, and the returned students were apparently newcomers with little practical experience in the movement. According to Li Ang, they were thoroughly disliked by the party rank and file.

These men were all young students and, needless to say, they had made no contribution to the Chinese revolution (when we were in the revolution, they were still suckling milk at their mothers' breasts) because they had not taken part in any actual work.<sup>48</sup>

To complicate matters still further, it seems that while Ho Meng-hsiung and Ch'en Shao-yü and his group opposed Li, these two men—Ho and Ch'en—who should have been natural allies, were also in opposition to each other. Later, after Li's removal from the leadership, Ch'en and Ho

<sup>43</sup> See *Hung-ch'i*, Sept. 24, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> See chap. vi.

<sup>45</sup> Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 53.

<sup>46</sup> *Chuan pien* (Transformations), p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t'ao lun" (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san Line), Dec. 1930, *Pu-erh-se-wei-k'e* (Bolshevik), IV, No. 3 (May 10, 1931), 59.

<sup>48</sup> Li Ang, *Hung-se wu-t'ai*, pp. 144-45.

became embroiled in a struggle over control of the Kiangsu provincial party organization.<sup>49</sup>

At the May conference, Ch'en, who seems to have acted as spokesman for the returned students, focused his criticism on the way the conference had handled the question of soviet power. First, he noted that the conference of soviet delegates was being held in Shanghai, a nonsoviet area. Then he said that although several resolutions were passed and laws adopted, the main question, that of the establishment of a provisional soviet government for all of China, was not even raised.<sup>50</sup> When it became evident during the course of the conference that Li Li-san had no intention of calling for the establishment of a soviet government, Ch'en demanded that the Central issue a call for the first All-China Congress of Soviets, to be the founding congress of a national soviet government. (The original purpose of the conference, it will be recalled, was to prepare for the First Congress.) At first, Li refused. Only after pressure from several delegates did he accede to the publication of an announcement of the coming congress.<sup>51</sup> The announcement, however, was not made until after the conference had ended.

Hastily, on the last day of the conference, Li Li-san also ordered the formation of a preparatory commission to make arrangements for the coming congress, but Ch'en called this concession "meaningless" [*chia k'ung ti*].<sup>52</sup> Shifting his attack to the local soviet level, Ch'en complained that "not enough attention was being paid to the establishment of local soviet political power."<sup>53</sup> First, he said, propaganda about the soviet movement, procedures for electing soviets among the masses, and so forth, had not been carried to the masses. Party units were unwilling to send capable cadres to local soviets to work, and frequently sent cadres of "questionable" effectiveness. Finally, cadres looked upon assignment to the soviet areas as a form of "punishment."<sup>54</sup> The establishment of soviet power on all levels, Ch'en maintained, must be considered the most important function of the Communist movement.

By questioning the whole point of the conference and concentrating

<sup>49</sup> *Chuan pien*, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), *Further Bolshevization*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* See also Yakhontoff, *Chinese Soviets*, pp. 127, 130-32, and Perevertailo, *Ocherki istorii Kitaia v noveishee vremia*, p. 222.

<sup>53</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü, *Further Bolshevization*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.



on the central issue of soviet power, Ch'en was exposing the inconsistency of Li's plans with the policy of the Comintern. Indeed, Ch'en's criticism served to clarify the developmental role of soviets in Comintern strategy. Comintern strategists seem to have envisioned for China first the formation of local soviets, which would eventually become district soviets (in one or more provinces in southern China), and still later serve as the basis for the formation of a regional or even a "National" Soviet government. Of course, such a government would have to be located in a maximum security area to guarantee its continued existence (an outlying area distant from the reach of Nationalist troops) and have an adequate force for its protection (a Red Army). Once its location was secure, a "National Soviet government" could be set up, claiming the allegiance of the people as a "model" alternative to the "decadent" Nationalist government. Stalin may have been referring to such a sequence of events when he said in his political report to the Sixteenth Party Conference of the CPSU in July:

The Chinese workers and peasants have already retaliated to them [the imperialists] by forming *soviets* and a *Red Army*. It is said that a soviet *government* has already been set up there. I think that if this is true, there is nothing surprising about it. There can be no doubt that only soviets can save China from utter collapse and pauperization.<sup>55</sup>

If Stalin sounded somewhat puzzled about the status of the Communist movement in China, it is not surprising. His uncertainty stemmed from two factors: first, the Comintern had received little information from the CCP Central about its policies since early March; second, the Comintern had planned the First Congress for December, 1930; and Li was apparently convening it in May. It was widely asserted in the Communist press at the time that the May conference was, in fact, the First Congress of Soviets. Subsequently, soviet commentators on the May conference said: "This conference up to now has been erroneously called in our press the 'First Congress of Soviets in China.' Actually, the first congress of soviets will be held on December 11 on the anniversary of the Canton uprising."<sup>56</sup>

As becomes clear from their criticism of the May conference, as well as from Ch'en's comments, Kremlin leaders expected the "First Con-

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Selected Works*, XII, 258-59. Emphasis supplied.

<sup>56</sup> *May Conference Materials*, p. 172.

gress" to establish a soviet government, but were uncertain whether such a congress was actually being held. Soviet commentators further deplored, as Ch'en had, the fact that

. . . the question of the organization of soviet power was not completely clear and direct in the decisions of the conference. . . . The soviet movement, developing by giant steps, places as the order of the day the task of the organization of a strong . . . soviet government. . . . The decisions of the conference speak only casually about this, only in the most general phrases. The question of the concrete organization of power was not worked out at all. . . .<sup>57</sup>

That Li Li-san never intended to establish a central soviet government until a revolutionary victory—or near-victory—had been achieved is apparent from the record. But he did urgently need maximum prestige for his preparatory conference, turned formal conference, in order to give the greatest possible authority to decisions taken there. Comintern leaders may have interpreted the propaganda build-up that he gave to the May conference as an indication that Li was planning to hold the "First Congress" and to establish a National Soviet government, which may also account for Stalin's apparent confusion about the state of affairs in China at this time. But Li's position on this issue was consistent. Later, at the Third Plenum in September, he said that there were those who ". . . believe that a central government can be established on some mountaintop before Wuhan is taken, which is a joke."<sup>58</sup> This, of course, is precisely what the Comintern believed. In the manifesto announcing the First Congress, Li revealed his true reasons for convening the conference.

The first conference of soviet delegates . . . fixed the general tactics and the tactics for the struggle in the soviet areas, adopted laws on land and labor, outlined the political program of the All-China Soviet government and placed before the broad worker and peasant laboring masses of China the call to struggle decisively against militarist war, to revolutionary uprising, to the seizure of power in one or several provinces, and to the rapid establishment of soviet power all over China.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, the establishment of a central or National Soviet government before the victory of the revolution (as Li saw it, the taking of Wuhan)

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>58</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü *Further Bolshevization*, p. 42, and Li, "Po Shan fa yen. . . ." (Speech of Po Shan [Li Li-san]), Third Plenum Materials, No. 10, sec. 4.2.

<sup>59</sup> *May Conference Materials*, pp. 194–96.

was not his objective. His main concern was to lay down policy for the soviet areas. What policy? It was one of "revolutionary uprising . . . the seizure of power in one or several provinces, and . . . the rapid establishment of soviet power all over China." Li's real purpose in calling the May conference of soviet delegates was not to further the development of the soviet movement in the countryside, or to establish a National Soviet government, but to transform and to mold the soviet movement into his own instrument for imminent revolutionary action.

### *The June 11 Politburo Decisions*

The Central Politburo met one week after the end of the May conference of delegates from soviet areas. Having gained party acceptance of his "line" at the May conference, Li Li-san now presented his policy recommendations to the Central Politburo for approval. Two resolutions emerged from their discussions, the "June 11 resolution," which set forth the over-all policy objectives for the Chinese Communist movement as well as specific tactics to be followed by various party sections, and a resolution on reorganization of the Red Army, which included Li's battle plan.<sup>60</sup> These two resolutions represent the full-blown development of the Li Li-san line.

The June 11 resolution was a lengthy document of thirty-five sections and was, essentially, an elaboration of propositions Li had stated and restated in previous months. As in the May conference political resolution, Li Li-san's theory stressed the link between the world crisis and the Chinese revolution and the idea that the outbreak of the Chinese revolution would be the "spark" igniting the world revolution.<sup>61</sup> The situation in China was daily developing rapidly and evenly toward a revolutionary high tide.<sup>62</sup> This meant, as the Comintern had pointed out at the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928, that a revolutionary victory in one or several provinces was possible, but, the June 11 resolution hastened to reaffirm that it would be inseparable from a nationwide revolutionary situation. The workers' struggle in large cities would be the decisive

<sup>60</sup> Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 274, and Wang Shih *et al.*, *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang li shih chien pien* (A Short History of the CCP), pp. 129-30.

<sup>61</sup> Li Li-san, "Hsin ti ke ming kao ch'ao yü i sheng huo chi sheng shou hsien sheng li" (A New Revolutionary High Tide and an Initial Victory in One or Several Provinces), *Hung-ch'i*, No. 121, July 19, 1930, sec. 1-4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, secs. 5-9.

force signaling the arrival of a revolutionary high tide, but unaccompanied by Red Army attacks on key cities, local uprisings throughout the countryside, and mutinies within Kuomintang and warlord armies, the revolution could not succeed. Since all of these other factors did exist, the outbreak of a great workers' struggle in a key urban-industrial area would signal the arrival of a nationwide revolutionary high tide—a direct revolutionary situation. The most likely place for such an outbreak was in the Wuhan area, where the workers' movement was most highly matured.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the resolution maintained, a revolutionary victory would lead to an immediate transition to the socialist revolution without an interim period.<sup>64</sup>

Interlaced throughout the resolution were warnings against the wrong ideas that positively hindered party work which were then circulating. "The main obstacle to present work," Li said, "is rightist pessimistic doubt regarding the workers' struggle."<sup>65</sup> (Li had accused Mao of being a "rightist" at this time.) These ideas "hidden inside the party," the resolution read, "have become a great danger at the present time because they superficially support the party line, but in every actual policy show doubt, vacillation, sabotage, and inaction. Without overcoming all these rightist ideas, it will be impossible to carry out the party line and policy to the full."<sup>66</sup> For example, it went on, "the view that a nationwide revolutionary high tide can be precipitated by establishing a local regime [*ke chü*] in one or several provinces undoubtedly is extremely erroneous."<sup>67</sup> The resolution emphasized that "an initial victory in one or several provinces is the beginning of a nationwide victory."<sup>68</sup> There could be no doubt about this. The party had to "break down the localism and conservatism of a peasant mentality, which is the most serious obstacle at present to the expansion of the Red Army."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, "to pay no special attention to urban work, thinking 'to use the countryside to encircle the cities' or 'to rely on the Red Army alone to win cities' are extremely erroneous views."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, secs. 10–13.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, secs. 17–18.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 11.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 28.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 12.



In sections 22 through 32 the resolution moved from theory to actual policy instructions for the party as a whole. In the cities the party was to "struggle openly for the Red unions and against the Yellow unions."<sup>71</sup> At the same time it was "to establish and to expand the military organizations among the working masses (Red vanguards . . . ) and to intensify their military training."<sup>72</sup> In the countryside

. . . one of the major tasks in the execution of the general line at present is the resolute organization of local uprisings. The aim of local uprisings is to capture local cities and to establish local soviet regimes. . . . The most serious obstacle to the accomplishment of this task is the 'guerrilla' concept of the past, which advocates attacking instead of occupying cities and lacks the resolution to establish local soviets in cities. This is a reflection of the peasant mentality and has nothing in common with our present line.<sup>73</sup>

The mission of the party in the soldiers' movement was defined as not only to incite soldiers in warlord armies to mutiny and to come over to the Red Army "but to organize soldiers' uprisings against warlord war as a central strategy." What Li wanted here was not simply pledges of allegiance to the Communist cause after a mutiny, but soldiers' "uprisings to destroy the warlords."<sup>74</sup>

Vigorous expansion of the Red Army, especially in the soviet areas, was the most pressing task at the moment. Without the coordination of a large and powerful Red Army, a nationwide victory for the revolution could not be won in a China dominated by warlordism. The party must "mobilize the broad masses to join, support, and concentrate their armed strength in the Red Army. In order to break down the localism and conservatism of the peasant mentality, we must tell the broad masses that the agrarian revolution can be assured of victory only if the Kuomintang regime . . . is overthrown and if the revolution is carried to victory on a nationwide scale."<sup>75</sup> The Red Army's strategy and tactics were

. . . not only to attack resolutely, to strike the enemy's main forces, and to develop toward principal cities and lines of communication, but to change fundamentally its former guerrilla tactics; moreover, [it] must

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 25.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 26.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 27.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 30.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 28.

turn warlord war into revolutionary war to destroy the warlords and to prepare to carry out in a coordinated and organized manner, under the general plan, its military mission of an initial victory in one or several provinces. The general objective of this mission is, in coordination with armed uprisings in principal cities, the seizure of political power and the establishment of a nationwide revolutionary regime. The guerrilla tactics of the past have already become incompatible with this line and must undergo fundamental change.<sup>76</sup>

The "general plan" to which Li referred apparently was the second resolution adopted at the June 11 meeting, which included a plan for the complete reorganization of Red Army forces and an attack plan. In it, all Red Army forces were to be placed under a "single, centralized command," with Chu Teh as commander in chief and Mao Tse-tung as supreme political commissar!<sup>77</sup> Undoubtedly, Li Li-san believed that he could control Mao more effectively if he were directly subordinate to the Central Politburo in the chain of command. The four main Red Armies were to be reorganized into Army Corps. The Chu-Mao forces were organized into the First Red Army Corps. The forces of Ho Lung in western Hunan were renamed the Second Red Army Corps, P'eng Te-huai's troops in northwestern Kiangsi were to become the Third Red Army Corps, and the guerrilla bands under the general direction of Hsü Hsiang-chien in the mountains north of the Yangtze were renamed the Fourth Red Army Corps.<sup>78</sup> In accordance with Li's plan to expand the Red Army, all weapons were to be concentrated in the Red Army, which meant that armed, local, peasant guerrillas were also to be incorporated into Red Army units.<sup>79</sup>

The battle plan was as follows: the First Army Corps under Chu and Mao was to move from central Kiangsi to Nanchang. After taking Nanchang they were to move on Kiukiang, then westward along the Yangtze to Wuhan. Ho Lung's Second Corps would move from the west and Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien's Fourth Army Corps from the north on to Wuhan. P'eng Te-huai's Third Army Corps was ordered to move from its base in northwest Kiangsi westward to attack Changsha, after which

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 29.

<sup>77</sup> Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 274.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275. According to Smedley, "both Chu and Mao rejected this plan because . . . it would have denuded the Soviet regions of armed defenders and . . . deprived the Red Army of a revolutionary base."

it would proceed north to Wuhan.<sup>80</sup> The attack on Wuhan and the other cities was to be coordinated with workers' uprisings within the cities and local peasant uprisings in the countryside. Kuomintang and warlord armies would be immobilized by mutinies of their own troops.

Li's plans were laid. All that was necessary now was to await the outburst of a great workers' struggle that would signal the arrival of a revolutionary high tide. Over the next few weeks Li Li-san occupied himself with attaining this objective.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276, and Wang Shih *et al.*, *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang li shih chien pien* (A Short History of the CCP), pp. 129-30; see also Jerome Ch'en, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 156-57.

# 8 / Activation and Failure of the Li Li-san Line

The results of the May conference and the June 11 Politburo meeting had been immediately flashed back to the ECCI in Moscow by the Comintern representatives,<sup>1</sup> who up to this time had gone along with Li Li-san, apparently half convinced that the Comintern actually had sanctioned his plans.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of course, however, they notified the Comintern. When the leaders in Moscow learned of Li's plans their response was immediate; they called together the ECCI and brought in the CCP's representatives to the Comintern to discuss Li's resolutions. Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai took part in these discussions (during which he is

<sup>1</sup> Chang Kuo t'ao correspondence. According to Chang, "before Mif, two Germans were the Comintern representatives. They were 'right-wing compromisers.' Because Bukharin was purged these two were not sent to China right away, but were detained in Moscow for recantation and study. Later, they were sent to China, but because they were right-wing compromisers, Li Li-san disregarded them."

<sup>2</sup> Yüan Ping-hui, interview with author, March 14, 1964, Taiwan. According to Yüan, the CI representatives supported Li during the first part of the "line" but opposed him later. Yüan claims to have been dragooned into the nationwide General Action committee set up by Li on August 6, a claim supported by the fact that he was one of the nine or ten top leaders who attended the important November 22, 1930, Politburo meeting. See *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting), November 22, 1930, leaves 62-63.



reported to have said that “Li Li-san has gone mad”),<sup>3</sup> as undoubtedly did Chou En-lai, who had most recently been in China. Both men were also members of the CCP Central Politburo. It can only be surmised that among the Russian leadership Stalin attended as well as Pavel Mif, who seems to have been directly responsible for China affairs. (Several writers have claimed that Mif was in China at this time, having gone there with the Russian returned students in the spring of 1930. It is hard to see how this could be, because he gave a speech to the sixteenth Congress of the CPSU, which convened in Moscow from June 26 through July 13, 1930.)<sup>4</sup>

After lengthy and no doubt heated discussion, the ECCI decided to issue a stern warning to Li Li-san against taking the action indicated by the May conference and June 11 resolutions. They undoubtedly believed that the returned students and the Comintern’s representatives in China could bring Li Li-san back into line once they had openly censured his policies. From some time in the second half of June onward, the Comintern bombarded the Chinese Central Politburo with telegrams instructing Li Li-san to alter his policies.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Kung ch’an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t’uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t’ao lun” (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san Line), (hereafter cited as *Li’s Trial*), remarks of Safarov, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, p. 207; Robert C. North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*, p. 140, and Hsiao Tso-liang, *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930–1934*, p. 307; all believe that Mif arrived in China some time between May and June, 1930. The stenographic report, pp. 467–70, of the Sixteenth Congress (XVI s’ezd Vsesoiuznoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii [b] stenograficheskii otchet) shows that he definitely was in Moscow between late June and mid-July, 1930. Other evidence indicates that Mif went to China later in November, 1930. See below, p. 208. Chou En-lai also spoke to the congress. His speech is reprinted in *Hung-ch’i jih-pao*, Sept. 7, 1930, p. 2.

In his speech to the Sixteenth Congress, Mif gave a sober estimate of the potentialities of the Chinese revolution and the problems faced by the CCP. “Comrades,” he said, “it is known that the pages of history are not turned over easily. The upsurge of the revolutionary wave in the East, and in particular the revolutionary struggle in China, raises before us a series of extremely complicated and difficult problems that cannot be regarded as solved by any means. I may refer, for instance, to the question of organizing civil authority in China in order to prevent the degeneration of partisan detachments into militarist semibandit gangs, in order to ensure the participation of the masses themselves in all organs of power, in order to centralize, to coordinate the entire revolutionary-liberation struggle, in order by means of its decrees and practical measures to play an important agitational role, in order finally, and most important, to ensure the hegemony of the proletariat in the peasant war.”

<sup>5</sup> Yüan interview and Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo Report), reprint of a report given to the Fourth Plenum, dated Sept. 22, 1931, sec. 4.

The Comintern underestimated Li Li-san. He refused either to cancel his plans or to permit further opposition to them. The Comintern representatives, who now knew of Moscow's opposition to Li, opposed him also, but they were not permitted to talk freely with members of the Politburo.<sup>6</sup> Li, it appears, disregarded the views and wishes of the Comintern representatives.<sup>7</sup> Despite his attempts to suppress the telegrams, however, their contents became known to the returned students, who, led by Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), immediately renewed their attacks on the June 11 resolution.<sup>8</sup> Ch'en had been critical of Li's policies ever since his return to China in late March, but now that his plans were set Li could not afford further opposition. At a Politburo meeting in late June—early July, Ch'en and three other returned students, Ho Tzu-shu, Wang Chia-hsiang (Wang Chia-chiang), and Ch'in Pang-hsien, were punished for their opposition and given an "organizational solution."<sup>9</sup> Li Li-san put Ch'en on six months' "probation" (*ch'a k'an*) in the propaganda bureau of the Kiangsu provincial party organization, where he had earlier been assigned. Ho Tzu-shu was sent to Peking, Ch'in Pang-hsien to "lower levels" (*hsia chi*) to study, and Wang Chia-hsiang to Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after this, Ch'en wrote a letter to Li Li-san "giving in" to Li's views and requesting permission to continue work.<sup>11</sup>

Li Li-san successfully blunted whatever hopes the Comintern may have held that the returned students and the Comintern representatives would be able to bring him back into line. He simply ignored and isolated the Comintern's representatives, split up and punished the returned students, and got on with his preparations for revolution.

### *Li Prepares for an "Outburst" of the Workers' Movement*

While Li Li-san was dealing with his opposition, he was preparing for the outburst of the workers' movement in the large cities, which would be the signal that the high tide of the Chinese revolution—a direct

<sup>6</sup> *Li's trial*, remarks of Huang P'ing, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Chang correspondence, and Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao*, sec. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), *Wei chung kung keng chia pu erh se wei k'e hua erh tou cheng* (Struggle for the Further Bolshevization of the CCP) (hereafter cited as *Further Bolshevization*), p. 60; Hsiao, *Power Relations*, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> *Li's trial*, Li-san's report, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Kung tang nei mo i chi p'eng k'uei* (The Inside Story of the CCP and Its Collapse) (hereafter cited as *Secret*), sec. 5, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Chuan pien* (Transformations) p. 58, and *Secret*, sec. 5.

revolutionary situation—had arrived. Massive workers' demonstrations against warlord war in all major cities in China would precipitate the "outburst." Transforming the party's urban organization from an agit-prop into a military instrument for revolution was the task that Li undertook in the last few days before the demonstrations were scheduled to begin. He detailed the plan for demonstrations in Central Circular No. 82.<sup>12</sup>

Warlord war, the circular said, was China's central problem. It caused unemployment, hardship, suffering, and chaos among the people, but also worked toward the disintegration of the ruling cliques. The masses were opposed to warlord war, which explained in part why the "revolutionary situation is daily approaching a revolutionary high tide." Under these conditions, the Central called upon the masses not only to oppose warlord war, but "to turn warlord war into revolutionary war to destroy the warlords." It was with this in mind that the Central "decided that on July 16 the party should organize a nationwide demonstration against warlord war."<sup>13</sup>

During the demonstrations, "propaganda for anti-warlord war must be linked up with the propaganda for support of the soviet areas delegates' conference and the anti-warlord war movement linked up with the struggle to prepare for the establishment of soviet power."<sup>14</sup> The need to support the soviet areas delegates' conference of the previous May was emphasized. This was the conference at which Li successfully laid down the policy of Red Army attacks on large urban centers. Further, to ensure the success of the underlying purpose of the demonstrations, the Central ordered party units to carry on several activities under cover of the demonstrations. Strikes against warlord war were to be organized under the screen of demonstrating workers, during which cadres should infiltrate arsenals, railroads, naval facilities, city administrations, and so forth "to establish and to expand Red Vanguard [*ch'ih se hsien feng tui*] organizations among the basic working masses."<sup>15</sup> At the same time the party was also directed to organize the hungry,

<sup>12</sup> "Tzu chih ch'uan kuo fan chün fa chan cheng yü su wei ya tai piao ta hui te shih wei yün tung" (Organize a Nationwide Demonstration against Warlord War and in Support of the Soviet Areas Delegates' Conference), *Chung yang t'ung kao ti pa shih erh hao* (Central Circular No. 82); June 18, 1930.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

wounded soldiers, unemployed peasantry in the cities, and students into demonstrations as well, to give the entire effort a mass, popular character.

Close attention was to be paid to the coordination of the demonstrations-strikes in the cities and activities in the countryside. Since the peasant movement had already reached a high tide in the countryside, the circular stated, the party should "use the slogan of anti-warlord war to organize local uprisings." Of course, "any vacillation toward this policy is sabotage of the line." "On the day of the demonstrations the [party leaders in the] countryside must resolutely call the masses to armed demonstrations in close coordination with the developments in the key cities."<sup>16</sup> Here, also, was the signal for the Red Army, which, "in coordination with the broad peasant masses, first should carry out local uprisings to expand its organization. Then, in coordination with the workers' uprisings in key cities, it should attack them, destroying the main forces of the warlords and winning revolutionary victory."<sup>17</sup> In order to carry out this mission successfully, however, "the Red Army must change its former guerrilla tactics and eliminate all rightist viewpoints."

During the course of the demonstrations, the party was reminded not to neglect propaganda on the anti-imperialist movement, the armed support of the Soviet Union, and support for the Indian and Annamese (Vietnam) revolutions. There was this cautionary note. Local units were bidden to report constantly to the Central on the state of their work. There had been insufficient reporting to the Central by local units, the circular commented, and the Central had no other way of understanding the local situation, no other way of effectively leading local work. This was termed a definite shortcoming, and each local unit must understand that not to report was to "sabotage the revolution."<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the circular re-emphasized that

the organization of this demonstration against warlord war and for support of the soviet areas delegates' conference is to expand the mass struggle, but is not the ultimate objective of organizing this demonstration. Each locality must give strict attention to continuing to expand the line of struggle after the demonstrations are over.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 13.



The demonstrations were only the beginning, the spark. The party must

actively organize political strikes against warlord war, local uprisings, troop uprisings, and expand agitation among the poor masses, [carry out] Red Army attacks, and bring these together for the overthrow of warlord control, the victorious revolutionary war to destroy warlord war, and the establishment of Soviet China.<sup>19</sup>

Li Li-san had maintained that an outburst of the workers' movement in a large city would be the sign that the nationwide revolutionary high tide had arrived; he was proceeding to ensure that just such an outburst would occur, not in one city but in several—and at his command. Thus would “objective” conditions develop toward the nationwide revolutionary high tide—a direct revolutionary situation. On the same day that Central Circular No. 82 was sent out, Li also published an announcement for the coming “anti-warlord war demonstrations” on the front page of *Hung-ch'i*, naming July 16 as the date that the demonstrations would begin, without, of course, mentioning that they would be the signal for an attempt to overthrow the Nationalist government.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Li Activates His “Line”*

After the demonstrations had already begun and in anticipation of a revolutionary victory, Li Li-san wrote on July 18 that “the Central has decided to call on November 7 the first formal all-China Soviet delegates’ congress to establish a National Soviet government.”<sup>21</sup> Li took pains to distinguish this coming Soviet Congress from the recently held soviet areas conference. The May conference, Li said, had set policy for the struggle in the soviet areas, laid down the future soviet government’s basic laws, combined the revolution’s forces, and brought closer the nationwide revolutionary high tide; but it had not established a “unified, all-China Soviet government.” This was to be the function of the coming congress.<sup>22</sup> To prepare for the First Congress of November 7, the Central decided “to organize a central preparatory conference on Au-

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Li Li-san, “Chun pei ch’i yüeh shih liu fan chün fa chan cheng ti ta shih wei” (Prepare for the Great July 16 Demonstrations against Warlord War), *Hung ch’i*, June 18, 1930, No. 111, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Chung yang t’ung kao ti pa shih san hao* (Central Circular No. 83), July 18, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

gust 20,"<sup>23</sup> to which every province, city, village, district, factory, school, and military organization was to send a delegate. These were to be independent, non-party representatives.

By the time the meeting took place, the revolution would presumably be well on the road to victory. Throughout July, both before and after the demonstrations had begun on the sixteenth, Li Li-san frantically attempted to mold the party's organization (restricted, for the most part, to its urban organization) into a military instrument. In circular after circular, Li ordered the establishment of action committees, Red vanguards, Red mass organizations (*ch'ih se ch'ün chung tzu chih*), the expansion of the Red unions in factories and schools, and the intensification of military training in these organizations.<sup>24</sup> He counted on the Red Army's attacks, troop rebellions among the Kuomintang and warlord troops, and peasant uprisings throughout the countryside to make his plans succeed.

The most important step in the militarization of the party was the expansion of Li's network of action committees, which were for him "the party's most concentrated and powerful organizational form to lead the struggle." Temporarily, "under this organizational form, party and CY organizations are united into one organizational system . . . to lead the struggle during times of emergency"; when the emergency was over "this organizational form is abolished."<sup>25</sup> From this point on, however, every provincial organization was ordered to establish action committees.<sup>26</sup>

Li's over-all plan for the establishment of action committees resembled, in its developmental aspect, the Comintern's scheme for the establishment of soviets. Li had set up local action committees in various places earlier in the year, such as the one formed in Shanghai after the demonstrations of March 8<sup>27</sup> (the day, incidentally, that he announced the establishment of *Hung-ch'i* as the national party paper). On July 14 provincial action committees were set up in Kiangsu, Chekiang, and

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti pa shih ssu hao* (Central Circular No. 84), July 21, 1930 (hereafter Central Circular No. 84), and *Mu ch'ien cheng chih ch'ing hsing yü tang ti tsu chih jen wu* (The Present Political Situation and the Party's Organizational Tasks), July 22, 1930 (hereafter *Present Political Situation*).

<sup>25</sup> *Present Political Situation*, sec. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Central Circular No. 84, sec. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Chuan pien*, p. 122.

Anhui,<sup>28</sup> a step that effectively stripped Ho Meng-hsiung, whose power base was in Kiangsu, of definable organizational support. Action committees were established in other provinces as well.<sup>29</sup> A few weeks later, Li Li-san first organized regional action committees and then a nationwide general action committee designed to function as the command post of the revolution, controlling all party activities from a single center.<sup>30</sup> He was gradually building up a pyramid of action committees as his personal form of organizational control, consolidating support first at the local, then at provincial, regional, and finally national levels.

While action committees were the most important means of controlling the party, Li Li-san also employed other organizations to control and direct the masses in revolution. "The militarization of the party and the establishment of Red Vanguards are inseparable," Li wrote on July 21 and 22.<sup>31</sup> The Red unions, too, must be expanded and turned into military organizations and the masses drawn into armed organizations like the Red Masses.<sup>32</sup> These various organizations "are not only for the important task of organizing armed uprisings and winning political power, but are for preserving political power after it has been won. . . ."<sup>33</sup>

The main object of street demonstrations and strikes in cities, Li commented, was to involve the masses in the struggle, and to engage the enemy on a broad front, in streets, alleys, and so forth. "Demonstrations, like armed uprisings, are an art . . . and under present conditions have become the masses' main form of political struggle."<sup>34</sup> The party was to organize strikes and demonstrations, having its own well-organized and instructed group in each action to carry out its aims.<sup>35</sup>

Li Li-san repeatedly stressed in these circulars the necessity of opposing all "rightist" viewpoints and the further necessity to proletarianize

<sup>28</sup> Lo Mai, "Li-san lu hsien tsai Kiangsu kung tso chung ti chien yüeh" (A Review of the Li-san Line in the Work of Kiangsu), *Shih-hua*, Feb. 7, 1931, p. 3, and Lo Mai, "Tsen yang su ch'ing Li-san lu hsien" (How to Liquidate the Li-san Line), report to the Shanghai activists' meeting of Dec. 3, 1930, sec. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, and Central Circular No. 84, sec. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of Enlarged Politburo Meeting), leaves 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Central Circular No. 84, sec. 7, and *Present Political Situation*, sec. 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Present Political Situation*, sec. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

(or bolshevice) both the party and the Red Army.<sup>36</sup> All those who resisted "proletarianization" would, of course, be "rightists." Li particularly emphasized the proletarianization of the Red Army.

The Red Army is one of the main motivating forces of the Chinese revolution. Under the present line of rapidly expanding the Red Army, strengthening the party's leadership in the Red Army is one of the most important conditions in protecting the victory of the Chinese revolution. Therefore, the party must be completely open in the Red Army and the former secret organizational form be changed. [The party] in particular should send factory workers and unemployed workers to the Red Army to create its main cadre, strengthen its proletarian leadership by adding hired workers and poor peasants to alter its composition, eliminating rich peasant elements and rich peasant leadership.<sup>37</sup>

According to Wang Ming (Ch'en Shao-yü), Li Li-san never completely succeeded in his attempt to gain control of the Red Army, even after the decision to reorganize it was taken in June. The forces under Li's actual control were never stronger than those under the control of the Chu-Mao leadership and P'eng Te-huai, although theoretically Li controlled all of the Red Army.<sup>38</sup>

By July 22, 1930, Li's plans were in full swing. Demonstrations were in progress in several cities, but none had yet led to uprisings; the Red Army had moved into position according to plan. The warlord war, fortunately for Li Li-san, had reached one of its many critical junctures in June and July, providing favorable circumstances for Communist forces. On June 4 the Kwangsi force under Chang Fa-kuei had occupied Changsha and then proceeded to Wuhan.<sup>39</sup> In a major victory, Yen Hsi-shan captured Tsinan on the twenty-fifth. Although Hunanese forces recaptured Changsha for Chiang Kai-shek on the seventeenth of June, their allegiance was uncertain. During this period, from early June until mid-August when Chiang was finally able to wrest Tsinan from Yen's possession, the Kuomintang's fortunes were at a low ebb.<sup>40</sup>

Possibilities for a partial Communist victory in the wake of this

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming), *Further Bolshevization*, p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Survey of International Affairs*, p. 558.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336; cf. H. G. W. Woodhead (ed.), *China Yearbook*, 1931, p. 431.



conflict appeared promising. It was at this time, on July 23, 1930, that a letter from the Comintern arrived at the CCP Central, the first such formal statement of policy since the October letter of the previous year during the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis.

*The Comintern's Letter of July 23, 1930.*

In its letter, the Comintern contradicted virtually every major policy measure that Li Li-san had advocated since the previous February. On the issues of the establishment of a soviet government, the Red Army, soviet areas, non-soviet areas, guerrilla warfare, the transition to socialism, and, most important, on the estimation of the current revolutionary situation, the positions of the Comintern and Li Li-san were shown to be diametrically opposed.

The Comintern's general analysis was that "there is not yet an all-China objective revolutionary situation," but it conceded "the direction of recent events is such that if the revolutionary situation cannot embrace the entire territory of China, at least it may cover several important provinces."<sup>41</sup> Li's position was that a revolutionary situation in one or several provinces could not be separated from a nationwide revolutionary situation.<sup>42</sup> The Comintern qualified its analysis by stating that any further revolutionary possibilities would depend on the party's ability to accomplish certain tasks, which were in general "the strengthening of its leadership and the developing of the soviet movement."<sup>43</sup> What were these tasks on which so much depended?

First, the Comintern viewed "the task of organizing a central soviet government" as being of primary importance. This was inextricably linked to the establishment of a Red Army "in the most secure area, completely under the leadership of the Communist Party and capable of serving as a support to the government." Formation and strengthening of a Red Army was necessary "in order in the future, depending on military-political conditions, to occupy one or several industrial and

<sup>41</sup> "Chung kuo wen t'i chüeh i an . . ." (Resolution on the Chinese Question), July 23, 1930, sec. 4, in *Shih-hua*, Oct. 30, 1930, sec. 4, pp. 2–5 (hereafter cited as *CI July 23*). For a point-by-point comparison of the July 11 resolution by Li Li-san and the July 23 Comintern letter, see also Hsiao, *Power Relations . . .*, pp. 25–26.

<sup>42</sup> See chap. vi.

<sup>43</sup> *CI July 23*, sec. 4.

administrative centers."<sup>44</sup> Li Li-san planned to wait until the victory of the revolution before establishing a soviet central government;<sup>45</sup> he had ordered the Red Army to leave its soviet enclaves or "bases" in the south and move northward to concentrate in the Wuhan area.<sup>46</sup> Li Li-san and the Comintern agreed that the Red Army should be strengthened, but disagreed on its immediate function. The Comintern wanted the Red Army to serve "as a support to the [soviet] government"; Li had already ordered Communist army units to attack urban strongholds of the Nationalist government.

The Comintern saw the soviet areas of southern China—the area of the 1925–1927 revolution—as the areas of basic strength of the Communist movement. Li maintained that the workers' movement in the large cities was the bulwark of the revolution. The Comintern affirmed that "at the center of the Chinese revolution stands the agrarian question. The revolution itself is developing in the form of a peasant war, led by the proletariat."<sup>47</sup> For this reason the Comintern urged the CCP to focus its attention on the soviet movement.

At the center of its attention in the soviet areas the party should place the solution of the land problem. The agrarian revolution should not be a kulak, but a poor and middle peasant revolution. Its moving force must be the agricultural laborers, the village poor, closely allied with the middle peasants and under the leadership of the working class.<sup>48</sup>

"Linked with the agrarian revolution in the soviet territories is the task of the trade union organization of farm laborers and village proletariat and the organization of groups of poor peasants." Here the objective was the ultimate "disfranchisement of the kulaks, gentry, and landowners." The village soviet was to be the "basic form of organization of the peasant masses."<sup>49</sup> In its economic policy in the soviet areas the party was "to avoid premature measures." It was not to assume

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5. The Comintern's instructions regarding the organization of soviet power and the build-up of the Red Army are restatements of its instructions given to the CCP at its Sixth Congress in 1928. Cf. chap. ii, above, pp. 52–55, and the *CI July 23* letter, secs. 5 through 12.

<sup>45</sup> See Li Li-san, "Po shan fa yen" (Speech of Po Shan—Third Plenum Materials, No. 10).

<sup>46</sup> See *Chung yang t'ung kao ti ch'i shih hao* (Central Circular No. 70).

<sup>47</sup> *CI July 23*, sec. 28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 7.

functions that would only alienate the peasantry, such as prohibiting purchase and sale of land, centralizing supply, regulating trade, and so forth.<sup>50</sup> The party must strive, the resolution continued, to improve living conditions in the soviet areas. "The eight-hour working day, minimum social legislation, and the freedom to organize and run class trade unions should be legally established."<sup>51</sup> Li Li-san's labor legislation generally seemed to follow Comintern directives, but the "premature measures" that were to be avoided were precisely those that he had advocated.<sup>52</sup> His land law implied relative leniency toward the rich peasant. He ordered the regulation and restriction of trade, the prohibition of purchase and sale of land, the centralization of supplies like salt and kerosene, and went so far as to call for "collectivization" in certain areas.

In the cities and countryside outside the soviet areas the party was instructed to work for the further development of the strike movement, "to strengthen itself by work in the mass, Yellow unions, and, at the same time, to strengthen the Red unions."<sup>53</sup> In the non-soviet countryside, "the party should establish peasant committees, peasant unions, and struggle committees." It should call on the broad peasant masses to support the soviet districts and take up arms in guerrilla warfare, employing every means of stirring up the peasantry against the Nationalist regime.<sup>54</sup> Special emphasis was to be placed on work among the national minorities to intensify separatist tendencies.<sup>55</sup>

Li Li-san, on the other hand, called for opposition to the Yellow unions. He directed the abolition of agitprop-type mass organizations and their replacement by mass military organizations, such as the "Red Masses organization," and the "Red Vanguard." Li had gradually eliminated existing party organizations while he was concentrating authority in action committees (*hsing tung wei yüan hui*), which had been formed at local, provincial, regional, and national levels.<sup>56</sup> The Comintern's clear objective was to expand Communist organizational and propaganda influence as widely as possible among the masses; Li Li-san

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 9.

<sup>52</sup> See chap. vii.

<sup>53</sup> *CI July 23*, sec. 13.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 17.

<sup>56</sup> See especially below, p. 178.

attempted to concentrate all of the party's resources into a striking force for immediate armed military action.

The Comintern urged the Li Li-san leadership to increase the breadth and depth of guerrilla warfare, but warned against the dangers inherent in such an increase in military activity.

In connection with the need for the development by every means of the guerrilla movement and the bold leadership of peasant uprisings and the strike struggle, the danger of putschist and sectarian tendencies increases. These find expression in the underestimation of the role of the masses, in the elaboration of plans for uprisings without taking into account the participation of the broad masses, in shifting the center of gravity in individual cases from the broad peasant masses to soldier mutinies in the militarist armies, in attempts at the formal-mechanistic realization of revolutionary tactics in the strike struggle, in manifestations of the infantile disease of 'leftism' in the economic policy of the soviet districts.<sup>57</sup>

Here was a further warning against Li's policy, carefully worded but unmistakably clear, for Li's plans included, among other things, "soldier-mutinies," "revolutionary tactics in the strike struggle" as well as "leftism' in the economic policy of the soviet districts." Certainly, even an increase in the breadth and depth of guerrilla warfare was many steps removed from a direct military attack on the Nationalist regime. Yet the Comintern suggested even this increase cautiously.

On the question of the present stage of the revolution, the Comintern restated its thesis that the Chinese revolution was in the bourgeois-democratic stage and must "pass through many transitory stages before becoming a socialist revolution."<sup>58</sup> The transition to socialism, the Comintern wrote, "presupposes a series of intermediary stages . . . [it] is an extended process, which breaks down into a number of concrete, consistently implemented measures."<sup>59</sup> Li Li-san, however, saw the victory of the revolution he had initiated as the beginning of a "direct transition to the socialist revolution."<sup>60</sup>

It was in estimating the present revolutionary situation that Li Li-san differed most flagrantly with Comintern directives, because this estimate affected all other policy. In an article published on July 16, one week

<sup>57</sup> *CI* July 23, sec. 20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 27.

<sup>60</sup> See chap. vi.



before the arrival of the Comintern letter, Li set forth his understanding of the terminology and, on the basis of his definitions, his estimate of the current revolutionary situation.<sup>61</sup> As a Communist, Li Li-san was aware of the importance of the estimation of the current revolutionary situation and the distinctions among its terms—upsurge, high tide, rising tide, revival, and so forth. Practically every Central circular made some reference to the wave analogy as a measuring device to gauge the party's progress toward the ultimate goal of nationwide revolution. His reference to a "few comrades who understand Russian" in this article left little doubt that it was intended for the returned students, who, Li believed, "still did not understand" the wave analogy. On the eve of revolution, Li wanted to be doubly certain that there would be no misapprehension of his estimate of the revolutionary situation owing to some misunderstanding of revolutionary theory.

"Those few comrades who understand Russian," Li said, "and have translated the Russian word *podem* [upsurge] into the Chinese 'revolutionary high tide' [*ke ming kao ch'ao*] have definitely mistranslated. Similarly, to take the Chinese word 'revolutionary high tide' and to translate it into the Russian word *podem* is also a serious translation error." Li maintained that

. . . a revolutionary *podem* represents the complete process of revolutionary development—from its beginning, to its development upward, up to the uprising situation; but the revolutionary high tide represents the highest stage in the development of the complete process of the revolution. Therefore, to translate *podem* as revolutionary high tide, or vice versa, is a serious error of translation.<sup>62</sup>

"In the Central's articles often revolutionary high tide and direct revolutionary situation are used interchangeably; moreover, they are often used in the following way: 'revolutionary high tide—direct revolutionary situation.' " A small group of comrades had criticized the Central, and Li, saying

"[It [the Central] doesn't understand the definitional differences of these two terms, it doesn't understand that these two definitions represent two different revolutionary situations." Actually, these comrades have not studied the mistakes of their own translations. To say that *podem* and

<sup>61</sup> Li Li-san, "Tsai lun ke ming kao ch'ao" (Another Discussion of the Revolutionary High Tide), *Hung-ch'i*, July 16, 1930.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

"direct revolutionary situation" represent the same revolutionary situation, of course, is wrong, but there is not the slightest error in saying that "revolutionary high tide" and "direct revolutionary situation" represent the same revolutionary situation.<sup>63</sup>

Restating his position, Li affirmed that the "present revolutionary situation is one of revolutionary revival, swiftly developing upward, daily approaching a revolutionary high tide—an uprising situation; that is: the present revolutionary *podem* is daily approaching a revolutionary high tide—an uprising situation." If the party's theoretical position were not fully understood, said Li, "the comrades" would only muddle the various terms like *podem*, high tide, high rise, revival, and so forth.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout his period of leadership, Li Li-san used this formulation consistently, although other CCP leaders—the returned students and also Chou En-lai—disagreed with it.<sup>65</sup> The distinction he made between *upsurge* and *high tide* was not inconsistent with the writings of Lenin and Stalin and Comintern directives to the CCP,<sup>66</sup> but his definitions of

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> The interpretation of the "high tide" concept was a bone of contention between Li Li-san and Chou En-lai. In early 1930 at a Kiangsu provincial conference, Chou En-lai argued that "high tide" (*kao ch'ao*) and "upsurge" (*kao chang*) were the same and that a direct revolutionary situation grew on the basis of a high tide. Li, on the other hand, said that a "high tide" equated to a direct revolutionary situation, and that both were different from "upsurge" (*kao chang*). Chou claimed that this problem existed from the very first Central circular written after the Sixth Congress. (See *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* [Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting], Nov. 22, 1930, leaf 23.)

Since Li was in power in early 1930, Chou gave in to his interpretation, but at the Third Plenum Li's position had become too weak to maintain his earlier view, and the issue was resolved by simply deleting the term "high tide" (*kao ch'ao*). This left "upsurge" (*kao chang*) to denote the long process of the growth of the revolution and "objective revolutionary situation" to indicate a situation propitious to armed attack against the ruling class. Chou's logic was that the terms "high tide" and "upsurge" were too easily confused. (See the note at the end of the Third Plenum resolution accepting the July 23 CI letter, in *Shih-hua*, Oct. 30, 1930, p. 10.)

Actually, both Li (intentionally) and Chou erred in assuming that the term "high tide" automatically referred to all of China. The crucial question was the area of applicability of the term, and this could only be determined by the accompanying qualifiers. Thus, a "new revolutionary high tide in one or more provinces" clearly restricted the high tide to a few provinces, while a "nationwide revolutionary high tide" applied to all of China.

<sup>66</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Marxism and Uprising," *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, II, 404. J. V. Stalin, "Foundations of Leninism," *Selected Works*, VI, 164. *Hung-se wen-hsien* (Red Documents), "Resolution on the Chinese Question," Feb. 8, 1929, p. 305. There seems to have been a probing discussion of the differences in terminology by the Chinese leaders as far back as the Sixth Congress of the CCP in

the terms thus distinguished were. Li's indulgent upbraiding of the returned students for their theoretical muddleheadedness shortly proved to be a factor in his own undoing. As if in reply to his article of July 16, the Comintern directive of July 23 scrupulously avoided the use of the term *high tide* [*kao ch'ao*], instead exclusively using the term *upsurge* [*kao chang*, or, in Russian, *podem*]. For example, the Comintern asserted that "the new upsurge [*kao chang*] of the Chinese revolutionary movement has become an indisputable fact."<sup>67</sup> It stated that "the developmental process of the Chinese revolution's new upsurge [*kao chang*] has its own special form. The new revolutionary upsurge [*kao chang*], for the most part, is ripening in those places prepared by the revolution of 1925–1927. . . ."<sup>68</sup> Not once in the entire letter, consisting of thirty-five sections, was the term *high tide* [*kao ch'ao*] used. In making an even more explicit rejection of Li's estimate of the current revolutionary situation, the Comintern letter stated:

In analyzing the present struggle, it should be noted that for the time being we still do not have an all-China objective revolutionary situation. The waves [*lang ch'ao*] of the workers' and peasants' movements have not yet merged into one. Even combined these movements still do not guarantee the necessary forces to attack imperialist and Kuomintang control.<sup>69</sup>

It continued:

This circumstance explains at the same time a certain weakness of the revolutionary upsurge [*kao chang*] which is apparent in its preliminary stages, when the struggling masses are unable to take possession at once of the industrial centers, and when the general correlation of forces at first is not favorable for the workers and peasants. This correlation will

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1928—a situation that irked Pavel Mif, who said at the time: "At the beginning of the work of the Congress several comrades . . . displayed great confusion in estimating the current situation. . . . Instead of analyzing conditions . . . they began to analyze theory—what is an upsurge, what is a swell, what is a wave, what is the difference between waves that are coming in and those that are going out, what is a ripple, and so forth, attempting in these verbal differences to find the correct definition for the present situation of the revolutionary movement in China. These comrades attempted to substitute words for an analysis of the existing situation in China," Mif, "VI S'ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Kitaia" (The Sixth Congress of the CCP), *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 39–40 (1928), pp. 18–19.

<sup>67</sup> *CI* July 23, sec. 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

change in a favorable direction only in the process of further development of the revolutionary struggle, when the peasant wave, led by the proletariat, spreads to new territories.<sup>70</sup>

The Comintern's analysis thus stripped Li Li-san of any theoretical ambiguity he might have attempted to use to maintain his position, for Li held that only a "high tide" equated to a "direct revolutionary situation" or "uprising situation." According to the Comintern's formulation, this was impossible. In Li's own words, "if in Comintern documents it is pointed out that there is in China at present an upsurge [*kao chang*], to translate it as revolutionary high tide naturally would be a serious error."<sup>71</sup> The Comintern did indeed say that there was an upsurge, thereby eliminating any possibility of theoretically justifying, from Li's point of view, the existence of a "high tide" or an "uprising situation."<sup>72</sup>

### *The Tide Turns Against Li Li-san*

Li Li-san responded to the damaging Comintern letter of July 23 by suppressing it, as he had attempted to suppress earlier Comintern telegrams.<sup>73</sup> As with the telegrams, he could not prevent knowledge of the letter's arrival from leaking to party leaders, although he apparently succeeded in concealing its contents until some time in September.<sup>74</sup> Despite the Comintern's clear and continuing opposition to his plans, Li Li-san decided to press forward with the attacks on the Nationalist regime at Wuhan and surrounding cities.<sup>75</sup> There were only four days between the arrival of the Comintern letter and P'eng Te-huai's success-

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Li Li-san, "Tsai lun ke ming kao ch'ao" (Another Discussion of the Revolutionary High Tide), *Hung-ch'i*, July 16, 1930.

<sup>72</sup> One scholar has argued that this was a distinction "of which he [Li Li-san] could not have been aware in advance," that the Comintern had resorted to a "linguistic quibble" to attack him. See Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, pp. 160-61. The foregoing discussion shows that Li was well aware of distinctions such as this.

<sup>73</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü, *Further Bolshevization*, p. 65; Pavel Mif, "Grazhdanskaia voina i borba za sovety v Kitae" (The Civil War and the Struggle for Soviets in China), *Bolshevik*, No. 13 (1931), p. 75; and also Mif, *Heroic China*, p. 68.

<sup>74</sup> Ho Meng-hsiung intimates that he was aware of the arrival of a Comintern letter, but not of its contents, in *Ho Meng-hsiung I chien shu* (Statement of the Views of Ho Meng-hsiung), Part I, sec. 12; the actual text of the July 23 letter was published for party consumption in *Shih-hua*, Oct. 30, 1930, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting), Nov. 22, 1930, leaves 30-31, and *Li's Trial*, p. 70.



ful assault on Changsha. Was this sufficient time for Li Li-san to have halted the Red Army's drive? The answer is that there seems to have been ample time—had Li wished to call off his plans.

When the Chinese Eastern Railway crisis erupted the previous spring, the Comintern had hurriedly established a radio communications network linking the Far East directly with Moscow, and sent Richard Sorge, who soon became the Kremlin's top spy in the Orient, to be resident director of the network. There were posts at Shanghai, Harbin, and undoubtedly elsewhere.<sup>76</sup> Moscow had direct contact with the CCP Central through its Shanghai bureau and at least sporadic contact with the major soviet areas by way of Shanghai.<sup>77</sup> According to an official report written in 1932 and covering the period from 1927, Kuomintang intelligence estimated that the Red Army possessed nine wireless sets distributed among the Military Committee, General Headquarters, the First, Third, Fifth Army Corps, and the Hupeh-Honan Soviet area.<sup>78</sup> It is not obvious how effectively this communication network operated, but this bare sketch is enough to indicate that Moscow's directives could have been relayed directly from Shanghai to army units in the field with very little loss of time had the CCP leadership desired.

Li Li-san did not alter his plans. On July 27, P'eng Te-huai's Third Army Corps attacked and occupied Changsha, holding it until August 6.<sup>79</sup> On July 31 the First Army Corps under Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung attacked Nanchang, but was repulsed and forced to withdraw twenty-four hours later.<sup>80</sup> Abandoning further attacks on Nanchang, the First Army Corps moved westward toward Wuhan. After a junction with P'eng Te-huai's forces in northwest Kiangsi, where they had retreated after being ousted from Changsha, the combined leadership of the First and Third Army Corps held a conference to discuss newly arrived orders from Li Li-san. The orders called for a second attack on Changsha, presumably by the combined forces of P'eng and Chu-Mao and a

<sup>76</sup> On the Harbin post, see Ralph de Toledano, *Spies, Dupes, and Diplomats*, p. 47; on Shanghai, see North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*, p. 164, and Snow, *Red Star over China*, p. 417.

<sup>77</sup> North, *Kuomintang* . . . , p. 164; Snow, *Red Star* . . . , p. 417; see also Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 96.

<sup>78</sup> *Ch'ih fei kai yao* (Red Bandit Principles), Oct. 7, 1932, pp. 122-23.

<sup>79</sup> Woodhead, *China Yearbook*, 1931, p. 431; cf. Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 277, and Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 144.

<sup>80</sup> Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 278.

simultaneous attack on Wuhan by Ho Lung's Second Army Corps and Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien's Fourth Army Corps.<sup>81</sup>

Troubles began to plague Li Li-san just as he was approaching the pinnacle of his personal power. At Politburo meetings of the first and third of August, a few days after the capture of Changsha but before the withdrawal from that city, Li was pressed to account for Comintern telegrams produced by the Comintern representatives, which called on Li to change his policy. The Comintern's position could be concealed no longer. According to Hsiang Chung-fa, "during June and July the International sent telegraphic instructions several times [*shu tz'u*], but Li Li-san said that the International does not understand Chinese conditions and cannot lead the Chinese revolution."<sup>82</sup> Li apparently felt it was no longer necessary to maintain that he was simply carrying out Comintern policy. At the same meeting he went so far as to express the wish that Soviet and Mongolian troops might be sent to aid the Chinese revolution.<sup>83</sup> Li's defiant attitude can be explained in part by the fact that he had just been named chairman (*in absentia*) of the Soviet government proclaimed by P'eng Te-huai upon the capture of Changsha and may have believed victory imminent.<sup>84</sup> For the same reasons Li faced no significant opposition among the Chinese leadership at these meetings.<sup>85</sup>

Li Li-san's difficulties had only begun. After the initial high point of the military campaign—the capture of Changsha—his entire position deteriorated rapidly. P'eng Te-huai had taken Changsha, but his hold on the city was tenuous; other Red Army units had fared worse. Workers' demonstrations in the cities—particularly in Wuhan—which were supposed to precipitate urban uprisings, did not materialize. Peasant uprisings were expected to inflame the countryside. Nothing happened. Troop rebellions were supposed to immobilize Kuomintang forces, but did not. Li Li-san complained: "The Red Army is powerful, why can't it attack Wuhan?"<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo report), sec. 4; *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting), leaf 27.

<sup>83</sup> *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu*, leaves 8–9, and Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 94.

<sup>84</sup> Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 277.

<sup>85</sup> *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu*, leaf 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

To facilitate direction of the Red Army and to goad it into more aggressive action, Li now sent emissaries to establish regional action committees to consolidate those on local levels. The northern bureau, the Yangtze bureau, the southern bureau, and the Kiangsu action committee were set up to conduct operations in their respective areas.<sup>87</sup> On August 6, the day of P'eng's retreat from Changsha, Li formed the Central General Action Committee, which was to act as the "general staff" of the revolution and direct over-all operations.<sup>88</sup> According to Yüan Ping-hui, the leadership of the Central Action Committee was composed of Li Li-san, Hsiang Chung-fa, and himself.<sup>89</sup> Li dragooned Yüan, head of Communist Youth (CY), into the committee to give some representation to the CY organization, which had been dissolved when the action committees were first set up. Hsiang was chairman, but Li held complete control. Theoretically, Li's organizational system now extended from the Central Politburo down to the local level. It was largely a paper system; Li gave "orders which never left the capital."<sup>90</sup>

The Comintern now dropped all pretense of subtlety, flatly ordering Li to stop the attacks on Wuhan. Lo Mai, one of Li's top lieutenants, recounts one instance:

At the first meeting of the Central Action Committee [August 6] the International sent a telegram to stop [*t'ing chih*] the Nanking and Wuhan uprisings and the Shanghai general strike, demanding that every member of the Politburo carry out a united-front-from-below policy. At the time both Li Li-san and I spoke up in opposition to this policy.<sup>91</sup>

Li's scheme was failing, but he refused to acknowledge defeat. Attempting to bolster flagging hopes, Li grossly misrepresented the actual military situation to party members: "Now it is exceptionally clear that Changsha, Nanchang, Kiukiang, Tat'ai, Huangp'o, and Shasi, all these

<sup>87</sup> "Li Li-san t'ung chih pao kao mu ch'ien cheng chih ch'ing hsing yü tang ti jen wu" (Comrade Li Li-san's Report on the Current Political Situation and the Tasks of the Party), *Hung-ch'i jih-pao* (Red Flag Daily), Aug. 16, 1930, p. 1. According to Hsing Chung-fa, Hsiao Kuan was sent to take charge of the Yangtze Bureau, see *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu*, leaf 42.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Yüan Ping-hui interview with author, March 14, 1964.

<sup>90</sup> *Hao ming pu ch'u tu men te*, Li's trial, p. 55.

<sup>91</sup> Lo Mai, "Li-san lu hsien tsai Kiangsu kung tso chung ti chien yüeh" (A Review of the Li-san Line in the Work of Kiangsu), *Shih-hua*, Feb. 7, 1931, p. 4.

important cities encircling Wuhan, have already been occupied by the Red Army or are completely under its control."<sup>92</sup>

Li urged the Red Army to attack Wuhan. A good student of Russian revolutionary history, Li cited Lenin's conflict with Zinoviev and Kamev prior to the October uprising in Russia over whether or not to attack as analogous to his conflict with "some comrades" in China.<sup>93</sup> Li was taking Lenin's view when he said that the (Wuhan) uprising must be carried out. These same comrades, Li said,

. . . were extremely suspect of the Red Army attack on Wuhan. They mistakenly believe that there still is no high tide of a workers' struggle there, that if the Red Army's forces attack Wuhan, this would be like the peasantry leading the workers . . . and because of this doubt the party's present general theoretical line. This kind of skepticism is extremely erroneous. We [Central] completely understand that if there is no armed uprising of the worker masses the Red Army alone cannot take Wuhan.

Li reassured the party, saying that the Central

. . . definitely does not have the view of employing only attacks by the Red Army; moreover, it definitely opposes this point of view. But at the same time, it also opposes another kind of viewpoint, the mistaken one that "to take Wuhan we can only organize the insurrection of Wuhan workers; before the Wuhan workers revolt, the Red Army should not attack." This is a kind of bookworm understanding. Simply to use the forces of the Red Army and not to organize political strikes and armed insurrection by the working masses is not only an error, but a crime. But only to be aware of workers' uprisings and not to use the Red Army similarly can become a serious counterrevolutionary crime. If we want to take Wuhan, we must pay particular attention to the combination of every kind of revolutionary force; on the one hand [we] must increase preparations for a Wuhan insurrection, especially in organizing combined political strikes by Wuhan workers; at the same time, [we] must actively lead the Red Army in attacks on Wuhan.<sup>94</sup>

In the hope of obtaining a Red Army attack on Wuhan, Li Li-san hedged on one of the three principal theoretical propositions that he had

<sup>92</sup> "Li Li-san t'ung chih pao kao mu ch'ien cheng chih Ch'ing-hsing yü tang ti jen wu" (Comrade Li Li-san's Report on the Current Political Situation and the Tasks of the Party), *Hung-ch'i jih-pao*, Aug. 16, 1930, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



formulated over previous months. He had stated that a workers' "outburst" in a key urban center would indicate the arrival of a nationwide revolutionary high tide—a direct revolutionary situation—and would be the signal for the Red Army's attacks.<sup>95</sup> The trouble was that workers' "outbursts" never materialized—in Changsha, Wuhan, or anywhere else. Now Li argued that a workers' outburst need not precede Red Army attacks. In the case of Wuhan, Li asserted, the Red Army's attack itself would precipitate workers' uprisings. He was in fact relying heavily on Red Army attacks to take that city. He had done little to prepare the workers for insurrection, but he had had little with which to prepare. There were only two hundred party members in Wuhan, in addition to one hundred and fifty members of the Red trade unions, hardly enough to stand up to the ten European-type divisions of Kuomintang forces then stationed in the area.<sup>96</sup> Li's preparations seemed to constitute, for the most part, appeals to the people to rise up against their KMT "oppressors." For instance, on the fourteenth of August, a public manifesto was issued that read:

The Chinese Communist Party calls upon all of the worker, peasant, and soldier masses of China actively to organize themselves in preparation for the great all-China armed uprising and the final decisive war with the imperialist Kuomintang. The Chinese revolution has the immediate possibility of an initial victory in the provinces around Wuhan and the establishment of a nationwide revolutionary regime especially [now] during the Red Army's most recent occupation of Changsha, approach to Wuhan, and the active preparations for armed uprisings by the Wuhan workers.<sup>97</sup>

As long as his plans seemed to be succeeding, Li Li-san maintained a firm grip on party power—to the extent of flatly refusing to accept directives from the Comintern—and he seemed impervious to attack. Once his policies began to fail, however, he could no longer keep his opposition in check.

<sup>95</sup> See chap. vi.

<sup>96</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei kei chung kung chung yang ti hsin" (ECCI letter to the CCP Central), received Nov. 16, 1930, *Kuo chi lu hsien* (The Comintern Line), sec. 3 (hereafter cited as *ECCI Nov. 16*).

<sup>97</sup> *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang tui mu ch'ien shih chü hsüan yen* (Statement of the CCP on the Current Situation), Aug. 14, 1930, p. 25.

*The Collapse of the Li Li-san Line*

The Comintern led the renewed attacks on Li Li-san and his "line." While it sent telegrams to Li Li-san ordering him to stop attacks on Wuhan and elsewhere, the Comintern's Eastern Bureau inundated CCP Central in Shanghai with resolutions on specific policy, all restatements of the resolutions adopted two years before by the Sixth Congress of the CCP, which were closely followed by all subsequent Comintern policy statements to the CCP.<sup>98</sup> The apparent intention of the Eastern Bureau was to indicate the continuity of Comintern policy over the two years since the Sixth Congress and to provide materials that party leaders could compare with policy pronouncements of the Li Li-san leadership.

The Eastern Bureau pointed the way by criticizing Li's policies. It said, for instance, that "after a careful analysis of the Central and provincial committee's documents regarding the organizational question . . . [we] know that the party still does not clearly understand the importance of the organizational problem."<sup>99</sup> Another comment read: "Judging from the materials that we have . . . the Central does not have a correct conception of the party's cadre problem."<sup>100</sup> The Eastern Bureau's comments were not all critical, however. The reason for the upsurge in the workers' movement in recent months was laid to the party's progress in both the Red and Yellow unions. The party's work in the Yellow unions was singled out for special mention: "In the past year the party has achieved fairly good results in its work in the Yellow unions."<sup>101</sup> There was irony, if not humor, in these words, for Li Li-san had vehemently opposed all Communist work in the Yellow unions since the previous June! In other resolutions as well—those on the labor movement, the peasant movement, the soviet question, economic policy in the soviets, and the organizational question—the same contrast was made. The Eastern Bureau emphasized the necessity of the party's organizations—Communist Youth, Red and Yellow unions, peasant associations, soviet organization, in building up Communist

<sup>98</sup> See *Kuo chi lu hsien* (The Comintern Line). Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , pp. 70–71, gives summaries of copies of these documents. I have used the originals.

<sup>99</sup> *Kuo chi lu hsien*, "Organizational tasks," p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, "Labor movement," p. 36.

influence among the masses, and so forth. These were the very organizations which Li Li-san had abolished “to accelerate the revolution!”

At the same time that the Comintern’s Eastern Bureau was flooding the CCP with resolution after resolution, the Fifth Congress of the Profintern convened in Moscow (August 15 through 30, 1930).<sup>102</sup> One of its primary objectives was to re-emphasize Moscow’s policy position and contrast it with the events taking place in China. Li Li-san regarded the soviet movement, particularly the Red Army, as an instrument which he could use to capture China’s large cities and industrial areas and establish a Communist state. In direct contrast, as the following excerpt makes obvious, the Comintern postulated the exact opposite relation between city and countryside. The *raison d’être* of the workers’ movement was to assist in the further development of the soviet movement. For the Comintern the soviet movement was supreme, the urban workers’ movement important but ancillary. For Li Li-san the reverse obtained.

George Hardy, who headed a commission to investigate the events in China for the Profintern Congress, made the most direct statement of the Comintern’s position. He said:

The commission has determined that the basic tasks in China are the mobilization of the laboring masses in support of the Chinese revolution, especially in support of existing soviet regions and the organization of the proletariat in support of the Red Army. It is important to note that now in China there is a significant unevenness in the development of the Chinese revolutionary movement, first, in territorial relations and, second, in regard to the unequal degree of involvement in the movement on the one hand by the proletariat and, on the other, by peasant armies.

Our tasks are . . . to overcome these weaknesses. But, comrades, in discussions we have noted that among several of our Red Trade Unions there are undesirable tendencies. There still exists a tendency to overestimate the revolution in China. They [?] think that there is a direct revolutionary situation all over China, forgetting about the uneven development of the movement, about the differences between the Soviet areas and backward provinces.<sup>103</sup>

It was an underestimation to say that Li Li-san “overestimate[d] the revolution in China.” He had radically deviated from the Comintern

<sup>102</sup> *Piatyi kongress Profintern* (The Fifth Congress of the Trade Union International), stenograficheskii otchet, Moscow, 1930.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 604–5.

line. This was the overriding significance of the statements by the Profintern and Eastern Bureau and was immediately recognized as such by party leaders in China.

Ho Meng-hsiung was the first to rise against the Li Li-san leadership. At a meeting of party and CY leaders in Shanghai on August 20, Ho

publicly accused the party, saying that from the Sixth Congress on, the party line had been bankrupt and that the bankruptcy of the Central's line was the bankruptcy of the Li Li-san leadership. He said that the Central had opposed the Comintern line and that he must oppose the Central and support the Comintern line.<sup>104</sup>

Ho's previous conflict with Li Li-san would suggest that this accusation was not based primarily on ideological grounds. Li's difficulties presented Ho with the opportunity to attack and—hopefully—rid himself of his rival and at the same time possibly advance his own claim to leadership. This could only be done under the line of complete support of the Comintern. The question of the method of selecting a new leader undoubtedly entered here. Ho was not likely to be chosen by Moscow to succeed Li Li-san. He had not been trained in the Soviet Union (as had the Wang Ming [Ch'en Shao-yu] group), and he was a supporter of Chang Kuo-t'ao, who was currently out of favor. The only way Ho could emerge as leader of the CCP would be at a conference carefully packed with his supporters, of course, under the banner of complete support for the Comintern's policy. Later, Ho called just such a conference. For the time being, however, he was satisfied to indict the party's top leadership and to continue quietly building support among the party rank and file.

By September 1, Ho's views had become so embarrassing to the Li Li-san leadership that he was prohibited from expressing his opinions through party channels,<sup>105</sup> and on September 4 he was removed from work status.<sup>106</sup> Ho then retaliated by writing the first of three parts of his *Statement of Views*, further castigating the party line and leadership as

<sup>104</sup> Lo Mai, "Fan tui Ho Meng-hsiung tai piao ti chi hui chu i lu hsien yü chi ch'ü hsiao p'ai ti an t'an tso yung" (Oppose the Opportunistic Line Represented by Ho Meng-hsiung and His Role as a Liquidationist Agent), *Hung-ch'i jih-pao*, No. 41, Sept. 24, 1930, p. 2. (August 20, it will be recalled, was to be the date of the preparatory conference for the establishment of a soviet government. The preparatory conference was never held.)

<sup>105</sup> *Ho Meng-hsiung i chien shu* (Statement of Views of Ho Meng-hsiung), Part I, Sept. 8, 1930, introduction.

<sup>106</sup> *Ho Meng-hsiung chih yüan-tung chu han* (Letter from Ho Meng-hsiung to the Far Eastern Bureau), Dec. 24, 1930, sec. 2.



un-Leninist and anti-Comintern. By the time of the Third Plenum later in the month, Ho had become a decided threat to the leadership group.

Ch'en Shao-yü's position at this time is not clear. He did not come out against the Central leadership, although he wrote a sweeping denunciation of the entire Li Li-san line after the Third Plenum.<sup>107</sup> He had led the opposition against Li Li-san earlier in the year, but he recanted and appeared to accept Li's leadership after being punished. Ch'en, however, had always opposed Ho Meng-hsiung as well, and may have remained silent during the latter's opposition rather than aid him by criticizing Li at the same time. Ch'en is vague about his own position at this point in his book, claiming that Comintern documents were not made public before the Third Plenum, and implying that this was the reason for his laxness in attacking Li Li-san.<sup>108</sup> Ch'en's opposition to the Central leadership group did not begin in earnest until after the arrival of the November 16 letter from the Comintern.

Meanwhile, Chou En-lai and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai had returned to China,<sup>109</sup> apparently with specific instructions to bring an end to the "Li Li-san line" by convening a plenum of the party, its third since the Sixth Congress two years before. One source mentions that Ch'ü had been removed from the Chinese delegation in Moscow, implying that he was acting on his own initiative in China.<sup>110</sup> His removal from the Chinese delegation in Moscow was simply to allow him to undertake a mission for the Comintern in China, for Ch'ü had participated in top-level Comintern policy discussions on the Li Li-san line since June and "knew it [CI policy] better than anyone else."<sup>111</sup> Ch'ü and Chou, then, were acting under Comintern instructions when they returned to China where they were still another source of pressure on Li Li-san.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> See Ch'en Shao-yü, *Further Bolshevization*, Part I, which was written after the arrival of the November 16 letter. It apparently circulated in pamphlet form until February, 1931, when it was published. Later it was republished in Moscow and enlarged with a postscript covering intraparty struggles after the Third Plenum. Cf. Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 203.

<sup>108</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü, *Further Bolshevization*, p. 89. . .

<sup>109</sup> Both returned in August, 1930; for Chou see Wang Chien-min, *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang shih kao* (Draft History of the CCP), II, 58; for Ch'ü, see his *To yü ti hua*, p. 146.

<sup>110</sup> See Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 63.

<sup>111</sup> "Kuo chi tung fang pu kuan yü chung kuo tang san chung ch'üan hui yü Li Li-san t'ung chih ti ts'o wu ti pao kao" (Report of the Comintern Eastern Department on the Errors of the Third Plenum of the Chinese Party and of Comrade Li Li-san), *Pu-erh-se-wei-k'e* (Bolshevik), IV, No. 3, (May 10, 1931), p. 73, n.5.

<sup>112</sup> *Li's trial*, p. 62.

But Li Li-san, determined to make one last bid for victory, ordered the second attack on Changsha and Wuhan, which he planned to begin on September 7. On August 15, he outlined a plan that relied mainly on the Communist Youth organizations now under the command of the Central Action committee (the workers had shown no inclination to respond to Li's exhortations) to lead massive demonstrations against the Kuomintang beginning on September 7.<sup>113</sup> The demonstrations would be initiated in connection with attacks on Changsha and Wuhan by the Red Army.<sup>114</sup> "All struggles," the resolution read, "now must be political struggles . . . and must not depart from the basic mission—the seizure of political power."<sup>115</sup>

The field commanders of the Red Army decided to carry out Li's instructions and begin the second attack, but their decision was not unanimous. Mao Tse-tung questioned the wisdom of further attacks against the clearly superior forces arrayed before the Communists both at Changsha and at Wuhan.<sup>116</sup> Mao was overruled, and Li's orders were accepted. The second attack on Changsha began in the first week of September and continued until September 13. Although it failed, as had the first, a contemporary observer remarked that "at one time it was feared that Hankow itself might fall into Communist hands."<sup>117</sup>

The main reason for the failure of the offensive was the superiority of the Nationalist forces, but the failure of workers' uprisings to materialize inside the Nationalist defense perimeter contributed to the defeat. Li's attempts to organize armed uprisings to complement the Red Army's second attack consisted mainly of paper appeals to the masses. The result was that Li Li-san sacrificed the Red Army to his own ambitions. Actually, the "sacrifice" was not as great as it might have been. After a week of attacks on Changsha, Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh withdrew their First Army Corps and retreated into southern Kiangsi, regrouping in the Kian area at the end of September.<sup>118</sup> According to Agnes Smedley, Mao's decision was "supported by P'eng and most but not all commanders" and "forced the withdrawal of the two other Red Armies

<sup>113</sup> *Chiu ch'i hsing tung ta kang* (September 7, Action Program), Aug. 15, 1930, CCP General Action Committee, sec. 1.1.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.1.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.1.

<sup>116</sup> Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 278.

<sup>117</sup> Woodhead, *China Yearbook*, 1931, p. 431.

<sup>118</sup> Smedley, *The Great Road*, pp. 278–79.

converging on Wuhan. It compelled the Communist Party to call off all its plans for a nationwide armed uprising against the Kuomintang. . . ."<sup>119</sup> Mao gave essentially the same account to Edgar Snow, omitting the central fact that he himself had contributed greatly to the "failure" of the second attack on Changsha. "This failure helped to destroy the Li Li-san line, and saved the Red Army from what would probably have been a catastrophic attack on Wuhan, which Li was demanding."<sup>120</sup> The Red Army was the critical element in Li Li-san's "line," but Mao held the key to the success of that army. Mao did not exaggerate when he stated that his decision to withdraw from Changsha "helped to destroy the Li Li-san line." The attempt to upset the Nationalist regime in mid-1930—the "Li Li-san line"—was a complete failure, and demonstrated the poverty of the party's "Central" leadership. It was not difficult now for Ch'ü and Chou to convince party leaders that a conference must be held to rectify the Li Li-san line. The stage was set for the opening of the Third Plenum.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>120</sup> Snow, *Red Star over China*, p. 180.

## 9 / The Comintern Reasserts Control

It required sustained effort from late September, 1930, until early January, 1931, before the Comintern could bring the CCP's policies back into line. There were two interrelated phases of this effort: the Third Plenum of the CCP Central Committee in late September and the post-Third Plenum phase, which began with the Comintern's letter of November 16 and culminated in the Fourth Plenum of the CCP in January, 1931. First quietly and prudently, then with increasing openness and heavy-handedness, the Comintern "built the pressures" and gathered the forces necessary to carry its view in the struggle with the CCP Central leadership, which was itself in conflict with the opposing faction in the party. In the end the Comintern had superior guns. It removed the Li Li-san leadership and inserted its own carefully selected and trained group as the new leaders of the CCP.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Third Plenum of the CCP Central Committee*

The Third Plenum opened at Lushan on September 24, 1930, and closed on September 28.<sup>2</sup> On September 24 and 25, *Hung-ch'i jih-pao*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, pp. 151–71.

<sup>2</sup> T'e Sheng (Hsiang Chung-fa), *Chung yang cheng chih chü kung tso pao kao* (Central Politburo Work Report), sec. 1 (hereafter cited as *T'e Sheng Report*).



carried a two-part article by Lo Mai, Li's faithful lieutenant, attacking the "opportunist line represented by Ho Meng-hsiung."<sup>3</sup> This set the tone for the proceedings, suggesting that the "Li Li-san line" would not be the main subject of discussion. The Plenum was apparently held secretly, and attendance was limited. Fourteen members of the Central Committee, including the Politburo, and twenty-two others, including representatives of various party bureaus, Communist Youth, and the Comintern's resident representative, attended.<sup>4</sup> Although one source intimates that Mao Tse-tung sent representatives to the Plenum, there is no evidence that either Mao's representatives or even the main object of attack—Ho Meng-hsiung—were present.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Comintern clearly opposed Li Li-san's policies and sent its representatives, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and Chou En-lai, to repudiate them, the Third Plenum came to what from the Comintern's point of view must have seemed a startling conclusion.<sup>6</sup> The position adopted by the leaders of the Third Plenum was that "the Central's line was correct and identical to the Comintern's line . . . but that the Central Politburo had made several individual, tactical mistakes," which had already been fully corrected.<sup>7</sup> It was the "right opportunists" in the party, who, "by distorting the Comintern's line, were attempting to use these individual errors to attack the Central's political line."<sup>8</sup>

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This and other locations are suggested in Hsiao Tso-liang *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930–1934*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Lo Mai, "Fan tui Ho Meng-hsiung tai piao ti chi hui chu i lu hsien yü ch'i ch'ü hsiao p'ai ti an t'an tso yung" (Oppose the Opportunistic Line Represented by Ho Meng-hsiung and His Role as a Liquidationist Agent), *Hung-ch'i jih-pao*, Nos. 41, 42, Sept. 24, 25, 1930.

<sup>4</sup> *Chung kuo kung ch'an tang chung yang wei yüan hui k'uo ta ti ti san tz'u ch'üan t'i hui i* (The Third Enlarged Plenum of the CCP Central Committee), October 6, 1930, p. 1. This item includes a listing of the documents of the Plenum and its agenda, which was comprised of Politburo reports on the political situation and the party's tasks, resolutions on the organizational problem, a resolution on the labor movement, and the election of new members to the Central Committee and Politburo.

<sup>5</sup> Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road*, p. 285. . .

<sup>6</sup> *Kung tang nei mo i chi p'eng k'uei* (The Inside Story of the CCP and Its Collapse), sec. 7 (hereafter cited as *Secret*).

<sup>7</sup> *Chung yang t'ung kao ti chiu shih i hao—san ch'üan k'uo ta hui ti tsung chieh yü ching shen* (Central Circular No. 91—Spirit and Conclusions of the Third Enlarged Plenum), October 12, 1930, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> "Cheng chih chuang k'uang ho tang ti tsung jen wu i ch'ieh an" (Resolution on the Political Situation and the Party's General Tasks), the Third Plenum resolution accepting the Comintern's letter of July 23, 1930, in *Shih-hua*, Oct. 30, 1930, No. 1, p. 7, sec. 3.11.

The Third Plenum could not have arrived at this position without the consent of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and Chou En-lai. What accounts for their shift? The Comintern had sent these two back to China expressly to re-establish its policies; this necessitated a comprehensive denunciation of the Li Li-san leadership, the Central Committee, for deviation from the Comintern line. Probably Chou and certainly Ch'ü expected to eliminate Li Li-san and assume power. Li had disagreed sharply with Chou over policy earlier in the year,<sup>9</sup> and had been one of those instrumental in unseating Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai when the latter was secretary of the party in 1927.<sup>10</sup> No doubt Ch'ü, at least, relished the prospect of being able to turn the tables on Li Li-san.

When Chou and Ch'ü arrived in China it quickly became apparent that their task would not be easy. The utter failure of Li's policy of nationwide revolution and his ruthless suppression of opposition had generated seething discontent among several of the party's leaders, the most virulent of whom—Ho Meng-hsiung—had already denounced Li's policy as anti-Comintern and un-Leninist and was calling for the removal of the entire Central leadership. Under these circumstances, if Chou and Ch'ü condemned Li Li-san for deviation from the Comintern line as instructed, they would be supporting the Ho Meng-hsiung faction's bid for power. Such a move would endanger their own positions in the CCP leadership, because both Chou and Ch'ü were members with Li Li-san (despite their current opposition to him) of the original left faction of the Politburo selected in 1928 at the Sixth Congress of the CCP.

This complicated situation is the key to understanding the Third Plenum. Before the Sixth Congress of 1928, two groups had formed among the Chinese leadership, the militant "left," and the more conciliatory "right."<sup>11</sup> The Politburo that was selected at the Sixth Congress of the CCP reflected this "left-right" dichotomy. The "left" group included Li Li-san, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, and Chou En-lai, while in the "right" were

<sup>9</sup> See chap. v.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 108. Another side of Ch'ü's personality can be glimpsed in Hsia Tsi-an, "Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's Autobiographical Writings: The Making and Destruction of a 'Tenderhearted' Communist," *The China Quarterly*, No. 25 (Jan. Mar., 1966), pp. 176-212.

<sup>11</sup> See chap. i and Chih Fu (Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai), *San chung k'uo ta ch'uan hui cheng chih 'ao lun ti chieh lun* (Conclusions of the Political Discussion of the Third Enlarged Plenum), Third Plenum materials, No. 12, sec. 1.1 (hereafter cited as *Chih Fu Report*).

Chang Kuo-t'ao, Ts'ai Ho-shen and Hsiang Ying; Hsiang Chung-fa, initially chosen as a compromise candidate, had eventually drifted into the "left" camp.<sup>12</sup> Ho Meng-hsiung's attack on the Central leadership was directly related to this broad, long-standing split in the CCP leadership. Since Ho was a strong supporter of Chang Kuo-t'ao, the Ho Meng-hsiung opposition was not only an individual attack on the policies of the Central, but a concerted drive by the CCP "right" wing against the "left." Thus, while Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai was undoubtedly willing to succeed Li Li-san as leader of the party, the larger issue was the preservation of the position of the "left" faction of which both were a part against the attack by the "right." It was for this reason that Ch'ü (and Chou, who apparently had reservations about the scheme) decided to unite with Li Li-san and give qualified support to the Central—disregarding the Comintern's instructions.<sup>13</sup>

This support took the form of an assertion that the Central's policies were in fact the Comintern's. To make this proposition plausible, however, the many differences between the Central's and the Comintern's policies had to be minimized. First, mistakes were admitted, but they were seen to have been "individual, adventuristic mistakes" not connected with any broader plan to overthrow the Nationalist regime by nationwide armed uprisings including Red Army attacks on key cities, workers' uprisings in these cities, local revolts throughout the countryside, and troop rebellions among Kuomintang troops. Second, the Central's leaders muddled the distinction between long-term strategy and short-term tactics. Third, they mounted an attack against the "right opportunists," who were distorting the Comintern's line.

Four of the five speeches delivered to the Plenum expressed this general position. These were delivered by Hsiang Chung-fa, Chou En-lai, Li Li-san, and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, the "left" group of the original 1928 Politburo. The fifth speech was given by the Comintern's resident representative (a non-Chinese referred to derogatorily as *lao mao tzu*), whose identity is unknown.<sup>14</sup> He adopted a quite different view, about which more will be said.

<sup>12</sup> There were shades of difference within these two groupings. An important one between Ch'ü and the rest of the "left" group has already been noted in chap. i.

<sup>13</sup> Chang correspondence and Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 68. Ho was apparently in close contact with Chang Kuo-t'ao during this period. See *Secret*, sec. 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Secret*, sec. 8.1.

Hsiang Chung-fa spoke first, noting that while the party's policies were on the whole "completely in agreement with the Comintern, the Central, especially over the last three months, incorrectly overestimated the revolutionary situation . . . and its speed of development."<sup>15</sup> It had ignored the uneven development of the revolution, committing several "individual, adventuristic mistakes." However, Hsiang hastened to add, after the arrival of instructions from the Comintern, the Central had immediately corrected all of its mistakes. These, as Moscow pointed out, were three: first, "preparations to carry out armed uprisings in several important cities"; second, "the tactics to be employed against imperialism"; and third, "the organization of action committees." All of these mistakes, Hsiang maintained, had since been corrected. The policy of uprisings had been stopped, and all of the party's former organizations, such as the Communist Youth and Red unions, had been restored.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, Hsiang opened the attack on Ho Meng-hsiung's "right opportunism." He pointed out that Ho's liquidationist tendencies had been exposed and attacked as early as the soviet delegates' conference of the previous May, and that he was simply using the present situation as a pretext to attack the Central leadership again.<sup>17</sup>

Chou En-lai reported on the Comintern's July 23 letter. He was apparently a reluctant accomplice to Ch'ü's scheme of supporting the Central, but went along because it was the less harmful alternative open to him. (If he opposed Li, the Comintern would be pleased, but he would surely lose his position if the Ho faction assumed power as the result; if he supported Li and the Comintern opposed this action, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai would bear the burden of the Comintern's wrath.) Covering all possibilities, Chou allowed Ch'ü to play the leading role at the Plenum and arranged to have two stenographers record his own speech to the Plenum. He released one copy of it at the time. The remaining copy he later rewrote when the Comintern castigated both Li Li-san and the Plenum, excising the few paragraphs in which he supported the Central.<sup>18</sup> He turned the second copy of his speech into a scathing

<sup>15</sup> *T'ê Sheng Report*, sec. 2.1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.1 and 2.3.

<sup>18</sup> Chou En-lai, *Shao Shan pao kao—san chung ch'üan hui tsai liao ti chiu hao* (The Shao Shan [Chou En-lai] Report—Third Plenum Materials, No. 9), Jan. 3, 1931, p. 1 (hereafter cited as *Chou Report, Jan 3*).



denunciation of the Li Li-san leadership and placed full responsibility for the decisions of the Plenum on Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai.<sup>19</sup>

Yet Chou adhered closely to the framework of the Comintern's July 23 letter even in his actual speech to the Plenum, except, of course, for the brief evaluation of Li Li-san's policies in which he, too, argued that the "general lines" of the Comintern and the Central were identical. In taking this position, however, Chou blurred the distinction between strategy and tactics. The Comintern had recognized the future strategic possibility and even desirability of Communist overthrow of the Nationalist regime, but admitted the tactical impossibility of the task at the present time. This had been the burden of the Comintern's instructions to the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928 and of all instructions since then, including the July 23 letter.

The essence of the Li Li-san line was the attempt to translate strategic possibilities into tactical realities. Chou said as much in his speech: "In evaluating future perspectives it [the Central] took a certain possibility in the future as the basis for action at the present time. Therefore, it made exaggerated and incorrect evaluations of the speed and degree of development of the revolution. . . ." <sup>20</sup> But while Chou accused Li of muddling the distinction between strategy and tactics, he repeated the same error. Thus Chou said: "Do the errors of the Central lie in a difference of line from the Comintern? Definitely not. There is no difference in line. The present task of the CCP is to win over the broad masses, concentrate their revolutionary strength, organize the revolutionary war, actively prepare for an armed insurrection, overthrow imperialist and Kuomintang rule, and establish a soviet government. All these objectives do not differ in the slightest from the instructions of the Comintern, with which there is complete agreement. The Central has made tactical mistakes because of an overestimate of the degree and speed of development of the revolution." <sup>21</sup> After giving this nod of support for the Central, Chou came down firmly against any further practice of "Li Li-sanism." In terms closely following the Comintern's July 23 letter, he went on to say,

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Chou En-lai, *Shao Shan pao kao*—*san chung ch'üan hui ts'ai liao ti chiu hao* (The Shao Shan [Chou En-lai] Report—Third Plenum Materials, No. 9), Sept. 24, 1930, sec. 2.4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

. . . as of today, the forces of the Chinese workers and peasants have not yet been concentrated sufficiently to attack the rule of the Imperialists and the Kuomintang, and there is as yet no objective revolutionary situation on a nationwide scale. In other words, the situation has not yet matured for armed insurrections on a nationwide scale.<sup>22</sup>

Chou came close here to admitting that Li's policy had been incorrect, but he quickly turned his analysis against the right opportunists. He pointed out that although conditions had not yet matured for insurrection on a nationwide scale, this did not mean that there was no upsurge of the revolution as they had charged. It meant simply that no attempt could be made to overthrow the Nationalists at the present time. "The Comintern resolution states," said Chou, "that the 'new upsurge of the Chinese revolution has undoubtedly become a fact.' This refutes the arguments of the opportunists."<sup>23</sup> The "opportunists" to which Chou referred were an identifiable group of party leaders with a particular view of the perspectives of the Chinese revolution. As mentioned above, before the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928, two groups with differing interpretations of the events of 1927 had formed. The "left" recognized that the revolution had failed, but held that there would soon be a resurgence of the Chinese revolution. This was also the general position of the Comintern. The "right," on the other hand, believed that while the proletariat might recover from its defeat capitalism would become stabilized in China. They concluded that a rapid and early revival of the revolutionary wave was extremely unlikely and might possibly be delayed indefinitely. Chang Kuo-t'ao and his supporter Ho Meng-hsiung shared this view.<sup>24</sup> It was to this that Chou referred when he spoke of the factuality of a new upsurge; it implied no necessary Comintern support for Li's policies.<sup>25</sup>

### *Li Li-san's Speech to the Third Plenum*

Li Li-san spoke after Hsiang and Chou, saying that he "completely agreed" with their reports. Adding a twist of his own, he said that although he himself had erred "it was definitely impermissible to allow

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Chih Fu Report*, sec. 1.1.

<sup>25</sup> I have cited virtually all of the comments that Chou made in defense of the Central and Li Li-san. They comprise only a small part of his entire speech of some 11,000 words, which closely followed the Comintern's July 23 letter.

the right faction to come forth and attack the party and the Comintern."<sup>26</sup> Li went along with the scheme of using the identification of Central's policies with the Comintern's to prevent the "right" opposition from ousting the Central ("left") faction. At the same time he assumed blame for his "personal" (*ke jen*) mistakes, which amounted to admissions of error in almost every aspect of his policies.

Li Li-san admitted that mistakes had been made in the estimate of the revolution, in policy toward the soviet areas—the Red Army, soviet government, and land questions—and in policy toward the nonsoviet areas—Red and Yellow unions, local uprisings, troop rebellions, and action committees—but held rigidly to the position that his general line was identical to the Comintern's. He avoided the crucial issue. No mention was made of the fact that all of these policies were parts of a larger plan to overthrow the Nationalist regime through Red Army attacks on key cities, workers' uprisings in these cities, peasant uprisings in the surrounding countryside, and troop rebellions among Kuomintang armies. To have done so would have revealed plainly the basic differences between the "Li Li-san line" and the Comintern line.

Li Li-san saw three main errors in his theoretical estimate of the Chinese revolution. First, he ". . . overestimated the general nationwide crisis, holding that if a great struggle broke out in some key city it would immediately become a nationwide revolutionary situation . . ." Second, he "believed that the workers' struggle was extremely intense . . . and that the workers could not but recognize the necessity for armed uprising and, moreover, were already determined to carry out armed uprisings. This was mistaken. . . ." Third, in estimating the revolution's speed of development, Li said that he "definitely took the speed too quickly, believing that if only a great strike broke out there would immediately be a nationwide revolutionary high tide."<sup>27</sup> Here, plainly, was the theoretical basis for Li's policy of nationwide revolution, yet he maintained that the party's general line was correct, falling back on Chou En-lai's analysis for support.

Shao Shan [Chou En-lai] pointed out that the party's general line was completely correct and identical to the Comintern's; because the general estimate was correct, therefore, the general line must be correct. The

<sup>26</sup> Li Li-san, "Po Shan fa yen" (Speech of Po Shan [Li Li-san]—Third Plenum Materials, No. 10), introductory remarks.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.1–3. See also chap. viii.

Central estimated that the revolution was daily approaching a high tide and pointed out the need to use revolutionary war to eliminate warlord war, to struggle for the establishment of soviet power, to win over the broad masses, and actively to prepare for armed uprisings as the current general line. This is in complete agreement with Comintern instructions. But the Shao Shan report indicated two aspects of the party's central mission: 1) regarding the soviet areas, and 2) regarding the non-soviet areas, which must be coordinated to prepare for the nationwide uprising. In this central mission we paid insufficient attention to the soviet areas, which was definitely a great mistake. . . . In the past we said that our main base was among the urban workers, and concentrated all of our forces in the cities . . . at the same time we also pointed out the importance of the rapid development of the peasant war, but we did not understand that this was our primary mission.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding the soviet areas, Li maintained that "past opposition to the *ke chü pien an* view [establishment of local regimes] was completely correct," because the Central held that

. . . unevenness was disadvantageous to us. Seeing the weakness of the cities, we wanted to increase urban work and to make it even [equal to the countryside]. But we did not realize that the countryside was our strong point. Nor did we realize that we should especially utilize our strong point to attack the enemy. Therefore, we naturally neglected in particular to strengthen the leadership of the soviets or to work for the immediate establishment of a soviet government.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, he continued, the Central's viewpoint on the issue of establishing a soviet government was quite "mechanical." The Central "held that it must be linked up with a victory in one or several provinces and wanted to establish it in Wuhan" after the revolution was victorious.<sup>30</sup> The Central's policy toward the Red Army was similarly inadequate, Li said, especially "regarding the work of strengthening [it]," although the "tactics were generally correct, such as changing guerrilla warfare"<sup>31</sup> into larger unit warfare.

"There were errors," as Shao Shan [Chou En-lai] had pointed out, Li continued, "on the land question" in soviet areas as well, to which "I completely agree, such as on the prohibition of the purchase and sale [of land]." <sup>32</sup> "The Comintern's instructions pointed out that the freedom to

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.4.



purchase land was entirely correct. In opposing the right tendency in the soviet areas, like the proposals of Chu and Mao [Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung] 'to protect large and small merchants' we therefore did not pay full attention to the question of the free purchase of land."<sup>33</sup>

On the Central's policy in the non-soviet areas, Li Li-san was less willing to admit fault, for this was his area of specific responsibility. He believed that "the occasional ignoring of the economic struggle was the most serious error in the workers' movement."<sup>34</sup> In union work, there had been some success in expanding the Shanghai Red unions, but not so great as it should have been, "because [Ho] Meng-hsiung and [Wang] K'e-ch'üan did not carry out the Central's line." On the other hand, strong enemy leadership "resulted in the abandonment or ignoring of work in the Yellow unions."<sup>35</sup> Li maintained that advocating local uprisings, as first done in Central Circular No. 70, was correct, but that error lay in "failing to note the unevenness of the peasant struggle" that precluded local uprisings on a nationwide scale.<sup>36</sup> Troop uprisings, too, were "correct in principle . . . but can only be successful under the influence of the workers' and peasants' struggle."<sup>37</sup>

Regarding his policy of establishing action committees, Li Li-san admitted that "as Shao Shan pointed out" the establishment of the action committee system obviously had been a serious mistake.<sup>38</sup> He continued,

The organization of the General Action Committee can be explained by our immaturity. Formerly, the General Action Committee organization was a mass organization, not a party organization. We turned it into a party organization and amalgamated the CY with it. Employing it was a basic error because it actually liquidated the CY.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, concluding his speech, Li, too, renewed the Central's attack on the "right."

The party's general line is correct although tactically there was a left adventurous tendency that should be eliminated through penetrating self-criticism. On the other hand, the liquidationist clique is attempting

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5.5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8.

to use this opportunity to oppose the party. Kiangsu's Ho Meng-hsiung holds that the Central opposes the Comintern and has created rumors to spread his own line. He is not correcting the party's errors, but using the opportunity to attack the party's line.<sup>40</sup>

Led by Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Li Li-san, Chou En-lai, and Hsiang Chung-fa, the Central presented a united front at the Plenum, but not all of those in attendance agreed with their position. Lo Chang-lung, a prominent labor leader, and Hsiang Ying, the remaining member of the right faction in the Central Politburo, disputed the Central's version of events, but their ineffectual protests were brushed aside.<sup>41</sup> The Comintern representative however, was another matter. "Several times" during the course of the Plenum he came out strongly against the key proposition of the Central's argument—that its general line was identical to the Comintern's. According to Chou En-lai's revised report and Hsiang Chung-fa's report to the Fourth Plenum, the Comintern representative maintained that "although, from the Second Plenum on, the Central Politburo's line was generally correct, during the last six months under the leadership of the Li Li-san line it has adopted an erroneous, adventurist policy and moved onto the path of an anti-Comintern struggle."<sup>42</sup> This was the position publicly adopted by the Comintern after the Third Plenum.

The Central faction at first refused to accept the Comintern representative's evaluation of the Li Li-san line,<sup>43</sup> but after extensive argument it finally agreed to alter the preliminary draft of the Third Plenum's political resolution to agree with the Comintern representative's view.<sup>44</sup> This temporarily resolved a crisis. Perhaps the Comintern representative even believed that his view had prevailed. Since he required an interpreter to communicate,<sup>45</sup> he was unaware that the Central faction had only pretended to agree with him to achieve quiescence. None of the agreed-upon corrections appeared in the final draft of the resolution

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Lo Mai, "Fan tui Ho Meng-hsiung . . .," p. 4, and *Chih Fu Report*, sec. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Chou Report*, Jan. 3, sec. 6, and Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo Report), Sept. 22, 1931, sec. 6. See also *Secret*, sec. 8.5.

<sup>43</sup> *Chou Report*, Jan. 3, sec. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, and "Chung-kuo kung ch'an tang chung yang wei yüan hui k'uo ta ti ti ssu tz'u ch'üan t'i hui i i chüeh an" (Resolution of the CCP's Central Committee on the Fourth Enlarged Plenum), *Kuo chi lu hsien* (The Comintern Line), p. 97 (hereafter cited as *Fourth Plenum Resolution*).

<sup>45</sup> *Secret*, sec. 8.

formulated by Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the final version of the political resolution contained the Central's interpretation.

The Third Plenum saw the resurgence to power of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, who had been leader of the party for a few months in 1927. From the Third Plenum until the Fourth, held in January, 1931, Ch'ü was again *de facto* leader of the CCP, although he "shared" power with Li Li-san until the arrival of the Comintern's next letter in mid-November. Ch'ü gave the speech concluding the political discussion of the Plenum and drafted the final political resolution "accepting" the Comintern's July 23 letter.<sup>47</sup> The speech was essentially a resumé of the speeches and discussion that had preceded it, the final political resolution a polished version of the speech. The view expressed by the Comintern representative was not included either in Ch'ü's speech or in the final resolution, nor was any mention made of the disagreement with the representative at the Plenum, although in his speech Ch'ü did mention the objections made by Lo Chang-lung, Hsiang Ying, and others.<sup>48</sup>

Along with the rest of the Central faction, Ch'ü restated the basic position that while Li Li-san had made some mistakes, the Central's general line was identical to the Comintern's. The real danger, it was asserted, came from the "right opportunists," whom Ch'ü attacked.

He emphasized essentially the same things that Chou and Li had emphasized in their speeches, warning that the main danger to the party at present was the attack from the "right," which threatened to turn the CCP from the path of revolution toward "liquidationism." All party members, Ch'ü said, must oppose the rightist tendency. He also referred to the July 23 letter, agreeing that the party must focus its efforts on two main areas of work: the soviet areas and the non-soviet areas. In the former, all efforts must be made to expand the Red Army, to consolidate and to expand existing soviet areas, to establish a nationwide soviet government. There was no need, as Li Li-san had maintained, to await the final victory of the revolution before establishing a government. In the latter, prime considerations must be given to the leadership of the workers' movement. Here, of course, Ch'ü was admitting that the Comintern had simply re-emphasized in its July 23 letter a policy that it had

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*; *Fourth Plenum Resolution*, p. 97; and "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t'ao lun" (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san Line), Dec. 1930 (hereafter cited as *Li's Trial*), p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> See the Third Plenum resolution on the political situation.

<sup>48</sup> *Chih Fu Report*, sec. 2.2, *passim*; *Shih-hua*, Feb. 7, 1931, sec. 8, p. 4.

instructed the CCP to follow all along. There was no later shift from the non-soviet to the soviet areas. There had been emphasis on both for the past two years.<sup>49</sup>

However, fully consistent with the "left-extremist" position he had taken at the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928 two years before, Ch'ü urged the continuation of an "aggressive" policy for the party,<sup>50</sup> implying his opposition to the Comintern's low-key strategy of protracted conflict. This view was evident in his discussion of the attack on Changsha. He believed that it was not at all extraordinary for the Red Army to attack Changsha and subsequently retreat. This, he maintained, was a common occurrence in military affairs.<sup>51</sup> Besides, he said, "before we attacked Changsha, there was a long period of guerrilla warfare in which our forces were built up and concentrated." The principal cause of defeat was not that Red Army forces were weak, but that there was insufficient work in the enemy's rear (*wu hou fang ti tso chan*), a shortcoming that had to be corrected if the Communists were to fulfill the task of organizing revolutionary war.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Ch'ü implied that attacks such as that on Changsha should, after correction of certain shortcomings, be continued.

### *The Results of the Third Plenum*

The Comintern's objectives at the Third Plenum were apparently limited to the removal of Li Li-san from the party leadership and the curtailment of his policies. These objectives were only partially achieved. Li's actual policy of attacking key cities in China in an attempt to bring down the Nationalist regime was quietly brought to a halt, and the party's organizations—abolished when Li established the action committee system—were restored to normal. Li Li-san was not removed from the leadership, however, and individual aspects of his policies were only mildly criticized. In fact, the Third Plenum decided that his policies were basically in line with the Comintern's, acknowledging only that some minor tactical mistakes had been made.

The Plenum's excoriation of "right opportunists" was partially to screen the fact that the Central's leaders were disobeying the Comin-

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



tern's instructions, but was mainly self-protective. The "right," the Ho Meng-hsiung faction, perceived a basic discrepancy between Comintern and Central policy and sought to capitalize on it. Yet this, too, was in part a screen to obscure the more fundamental conflict between the party's "left" and "right" wings. This helps to explain why Ch'ü and Chou disregarded Comintern instructions to denounce Li's leadership and policies and to support the Central against the "right opportunists." This interfactional struggle is reflected in the Plenum's resolution, apparently made by Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, censuring Chang Kuo-t'ao even though he remained in Moscow during the entire period under study.<sup>53</sup>

An important sidelight of the Plenum was the admission by CCP leaders that the Comintern had in fact been pursuing a two-pronged policy, in both soviet and non-soviet areas. This fact emerges unmistakably from the speeches of the party's leaders to the Plenum. Li Li-san, in particular, confessed that he had not carried out Comintern policy in soviet areas to the fullest possible extent, instead concentrating the party's resources on work in the non-soviet urban areas. Li displayed a clear understanding of Comintern strategy as it was restated in its July 23 letter.

In the short run, Ch'ü himself emerged from the Plenum as *de facto* leader of the party, sharing power with Li Li-san, who remained in the CCP Politburo. There was one serious flaw in the scheme. The Central group had saved their own positions, but at the cost of disregarding the Comintern's instructions. It was inevitable that they should reap the consequences of this decision.

As soon as the Comintern representative realized that the Third Plenum's final resolutions did not reflect the Comintern's instructions in the slightest, he immediately wired Moscow of the outcome.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, other party members—at the instigation of the Ho Meng-hsiung faction—showed increasing dissatisfaction with the party leadership and began to agitate against the embattled Central, still led by the "left" faction of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Li Li-san, Chou En-lai, and Hsiang Chung-fa.

#### *Between the Third Plenum and the November 16 Comintern Letter*

The Third Plenum brought no stable solution either to the struggle within the CCP or to the relationship between the CCP and the Comin-

<sup>53</sup> *Kuan yü [Chang] kuo t'ao t'ung chih ti chüeh i* (Resolution on Comrade [Chang] Kuo-t'ao), CCP Politburo, Dec. 16, 1930, pp. 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Secret*, sec. 8.5.

tern. Although the Comintern learned of the results of the Third Plenum shortly after its close, there was no immediate response. The full impact of the decisions made by the leaders in the Kremlin was not felt in China until mid-November, when the Comintern sent a letter totally condemning the Third Plenum and the Li Li-san leadership and policies.

Within the CCP the situation was, if anything, worse than before. Ho Meng-hsiung, goaded by the Central faction's frontal attack on him at the Plenum, now began a campaign to oust the Central leadership. He was joined by Lo Chang-lung, and together they attempted to win over Ch'en Shao-yü and his followers to oppose Li Li-san.<sup>55</sup> Ch'en's personal antipathy toward Ho made it unlikely that he would ever join forces with him. Still, the Central faction sought to remove the possibility of Ch'en's alliance with the Ho-Lo group by offering him Ho Meng-hsiung's old post of Kiangsu provincial secretary, which he accepted.<sup>56</sup> One source claims that this *liang hu tou cheng* (struggle of two tigers) was Ch'ü's idea; if Ch'en and Ho struggled over Ho's old post, they were not likely to unite against the Central.<sup>57</sup> In fact, this did neutralize Ch'en Shao-yü for the time being; while he accepted the post he did not join with the Central faction. On the other hand, neither did he oppose it by siding with the Ho faction, which indirectly aided Central in its struggle against that group. During the next month and a half a curious three-cornered balance of forces coalesced in the party. The struggle between the Central and the Ho Meng-hsiung faction continued and conflict erupted between the Ch'en faction and the Ho faction. Finally, although Ho was attacked by both the Ch'en faction and the Central, there apparently was a tacit agreement between Ho's enemies not to attack each other.<sup>58</sup>

The Ho faction's basic disagreement with the Ch'en faction was over control of the Kiangsu party secretaryship; the differences between Ho and the Central were more substantial. Ho complained that Li's policies had failed, yet Li and his supporters remained in the leadership. Moreover, Ho had been the main object of attack at the Third Plenum, to which he had not been invited. He now sought the opportunity to refute the Central's charge that he was an "opportunist." In an exchange of several letters with the Central Politburo shortly after the Plenum ended, Ho demanded that his case be given a full hearing. He said that he

<sup>55</sup> *Chuan pien* (Transformations), p. 158.

<sup>56</sup> *Secret*, sec. 9, and *Chuan pien*, p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> *Hsien tai shih liao* (Materials of Modern History), IV, 376.

<sup>58</sup> See *Secret*, sec. 10.

would acknowledge publicly any mistakes he might have made, but maintained that Li Li-san had opposed the Comintern's line.<sup>59</sup> In his last letter to the Central on October 9, Ho intimated that he would carry his struggle to the party rank and file if he were not given satisfaction.

Ho Meng-hsiung's strength, in fact, was among the rank-and-file party workers. Since early September he had been excluded from all party work and posts of authority.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Ho's influence and power consisted of whatever he could convince the workers in the Shanghai area was correct. In the exchange of correspondence, the party had charged that Ho's opportunism had been clearly manifested in his *Statement of Views*, the stenographic record of the May conference of soviet delegates (at which Ho vehemently opposed Li's plans),<sup>61</sup> and in subsequent work plans written while he was in charge of the Shanghai organization.<sup>62</sup> Ho categorically denied this accusation and demanded that the documents be published so that the case could be judged fairly.

The Central, of course, was not beguiled by Ho's ruse. It wanted to avoid any situation where it might become necessary to make point-by-point analyses of its policies, and denied Ho's requests. Finding themselves circumvented organizationally and relatively powerless except for their unofficial influence with the party masses, the Ho faction decided to organize their own Central committee with a triumvirate leadership consisting of Ho Meng-hsiung, Lo Chang-lung, and Wang K'e-ch'üan. The principal function of this new grouping was to create an organized opposition to the Central faction within the party.<sup>63</sup> The Central combated this move primarily by sending its representatives to conduct provincial and other meetings in an attempt to win the masses over to the Central's persuasion. Their efforts went unrewarded. Redoubling its efforts, the Central decided to focus its attention where the Ho faction's strength was greatest, in north (*Chapei*), east (*Hutung*), and central (*Huchung*) Shanghai. To these three sections of the city the Central sent its top leaders, Chou En-lai, Hsiang Chung-fa, and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, to win the party masses away from Ho Meng-hsiung. They had scant

<sup>59</sup> *Ho Meng-hsiung i chien shu* (Statement of the Views of Ho Meng-hsiung), Part III, letter of Oct. 9, 1930.

<sup>60</sup> *Ho Meng-hsiung chih yüan tung chu han* (Letter from Ho Meng-hsiung to the Far Eastern Bureau), Dec. 24, 1930, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> See chap. vii.

<sup>62</sup> See *Ho Meng-hsiung i chien shu*, Letter of Oct. 9, 1930.

<sup>63</sup> *Secret*, sec. 10.

success.<sup>64</sup> The hard fact soon became apparent: the Ho Meng-hsiung faction controlled the majority of the Shanghai party masses, and its strength was steadily increasing. Another source of strength was the enlistment of Lo Chang-lung, who controlled the Red union apparatus in the Shanghai area.<sup>65</sup>

The Ho faction was strong enough to cause the Central considerable embarrassment but not strong enough to oust the ruling group; on the other hand, the Central was unable to crush Ho's opposition. The result was a virtual standoff. However, if conditions changed and another conference was held—and Ho was calling loudly for an emergency conference—he had an excellent chance of emerging victorious. As long as no attack on the Central came from above, that is, from the Comintern, there was little likelihood that conditions would change.

### *The Comintern's November 16 Letter*

On November 16 a letter arrived from the Comintern that decisively affected subsequent events. Up to this point, the Comintern had attempted to dispose of the Li Li-san "problem" discreetly, restricting the conflict—to the extent possible under the circumstances—to the top party leadership. The Third Plenum, however, demonstrated both the inadequacy of this procedure and the lengths to which the CCP's leaders would go to retain power. The November 16 letter thus represented a decided shift in Comintern strategy in the conflict with the Li Li-san leadership, bringing it into the open. It exhorted the entire Chinese Communist Party membership to oppose Li Li-san, making his de-thronement a foregone conclusion. It is likely that the Comintern was reluctant to take this extreme step, for the resort to a mass intraparty conflict implied undesirable (from the Comintern's point of view) consequences. The more people involved in the matter, the more difficult it would be for the Comintern to control the succession to power. In a similar situation in 1928, the problem had been neatly avoided by holding the Sixth Congress in Moscow and preventing undesirable elements from attending. This time the Comintern sent to China its top man in CCP affairs—Pavel Mif—to ensure that Li Li-san's successors

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Hsien tai shih liao*, IV, 375–76.



would be men of the Comintern's own choosing. He arrived some time in late November.<sup>66</sup>

The November 16 letter flatly contradicted the Third Plenum's conclusion that the Li Li-san line was identical to the Comintern line. Li's policies, it stated, did not consist of

. . . mere occasional disagreements or differences of secondary importance in the evaluation of the situation and the understanding of tactical tasks. It is necessary to make completely clear that in the most critical moment of the Chinese revolution, two political lines differing in principle confronted each other. To conceal the differences in principle between these two opposed and mutually exclusive political lines would not only be harmful but would also involve the great danger that these mistakes might be repeated in the future.<sup>67</sup>

The essence of the Li Li-san line was contained in the thesis "a victory in one or several provinces signified a nationwide direct revolutionary situation . . .," supplemented by the "clearly Trotskyite thesis" that the beginning of the uprising would mark the beginning of a direct and uninterrupted transition from the bourgeois-democratic to the proletarian revolution.<sup>68</sup> This, the Comintern maintained, had been the principal theoretical deviation of Li Li-san, yet it had contained a kernel of orthodoxy. The Comintern had, after all, called for a victory in one or several provinces; Li's deviation was in expanding this plan for limited conquest into an attempt to overthrow the Nationalist government.

The bulk of the November 16 letter was an attempt to account for Li's deviation. First, the letter said, Li had failed to understand the concept of uneven revolutionary development. As far back as the Sixth Congress in 1928, the Comintern had concluded that a victory in one or several provinces was entirely possible in China.<sup>69</sup> It now restated that view.

The revolutionary movement can be victorious and is being victorious in a number of provinces . . . at a time when in other decisive parts of the country black, bloody counterrevolution is in power. The thesis of

<sup>66</sup> See below, p. 208.

<sup>67</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei kei chung kung chung yang ti hsin" (Letter of the ECCI to the CCP Central) received November 16, 1930, in *Kuo chi lu hsien*, pp. 77–90. Other copies of this letter can be found in Mif, *Strategiia i taktika Komintern v natsionalno-kolonialnoi revoliutsii na primere Kitaia*, pp. 283–90, and in *Shih-hua*, No. 3, Dec. 14, 1930.

<sup>68</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei . . ." (ECCI Nov. 16 letter), p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> See chap. ii.

Comrade Li Li-san that victory in one or several provinces would directly signify a matured revolutionary situation on a nationwide scale repudiates at one stroke all of the facts established by the ECCI and the CCP about the feudal fragmentation of China, the division of the country among the imperialists, the unevenness of economic development, and the unevenness of development of the revolutionary movement.<sup>70</sup>

Li Li-san's second mistake, the Comintern believed, stemmed from the first. He

completely ignored the fact that the upsurge of the peasant movement had significantly overtaken the workers' movement in tempo and scope. The upsurge of the workers' movement is not fantasy but fact. The workers' struggle has already spread to the most remote, most backward areas. But it is impossible not to conclude that the upsurge of the workers' movement in general, especially in the decisive industrial centers . . . is lagging behind the peasant movement.<sup>71</sup>

Third, any Marxist-Leninist analysis of Chinese conditions had to take into account the tremendous power of "imperialism." It was precisely the most important industrial centers—where Li Li-san attempted to focus his attacks ". . . which are not only under the direct and immediate blows of imperialist intervention, but the imperialists also hold the most important industrial, commercial, and administrative centers under their immediate, continuous military-political control."<sup>72</sup> Armed uprisings in these areas under such conditions had exposed "the flower of the Chinese proletariat" to destruction, had "bled the working class . . . bled the Red Army, and set our movement back." It was impossible to ignore the fact that "at present the preponderance of forces is on the side of the class enemy." Any other analysis "is not Leninism, but putschism."

Fourth, the Comintern maintained that Li Li-san completely miscalculated the strengths and weaknesses of the soviet movement.

There is not yet a soviet government in China and to the extent that one exists, it exists only in appeals, on paper, and not as a real authority which can organize and lead the insurgent masses. The soviet areas have not yet been organized. Soviet power has not been consolidated.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei . . ." (ECCI Nov. 16 letter), p. 79.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Nor had the agrarian revolution been carried out to the Comintern's liking. "Kulak elements," the letter stated, abounded in the soviet areas, in the proliferation of local soviet governments, and even in units of the Red Army itself. The equal distribution of land had only rarely been carried out. Groups of the poor had not even been formed, let alone organized into trade unions as directed. In this context the letter went on to criticize Li's policies adopted at the May conference of soviet delegates. The agrarian policies adopted by the conference had been rife with error. It was wrong that only confiscated landlord land be subject to redistribution, or that large peasant holdings not be broken down but transformed into state farms, or that collective farms be formed at all. It was, moreover, positively harmful to maintain that Red Army men would receive land only after the establishment of a nationwide soviet government. Also, the program of the soviet government promulgated by that conference exuded a "Trotskyite spirit." It set itself the task of "immediately introducing socialism"

instead of creating a strong soviet government, instead of developing and carrying out its program, and instead of organizing and consolidating a territorial base for the revolution in order to combine the soviet areas, to strengthen the successes which have already been achieved, to carry out a genuine poor and middle peasant agrarian revolution, and to organize the rear areas and to move up the reserves.<sup>74</sup>

Fifth, miscalculating the strengths and weaknesses of the soviet movement had led Li to make a gross overestimation of the revolution's armed strength. He had claimed that the forces of the Red Army and the workers were far greater than they actually were. The Comintern candidly admitted that

We do not yet have a true workers' and peasants' Red Army, with a workers' command staff and a strong party skeleton. The successes of the Red Army are great. . . . But this same Red Army is still [relatively] weak, insufficiently organized, and incompletely under party control. The social composition of the Red Army is far from satisfactory . . . the kulak has wormed his way into [it]. . . . Nor must one close his eyes to the military-technical weakness of the Red Army. It is badly armed, its firepower is limited . . . and so forth. These circumstances indicate that the occupation of the largest cities, frontal attacks against present-day imperialist armies . . . is not yet within the capabili-

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84.

ties of the Red Army. . . . The capture of Changsha and the forced march on Hankow were insuperable tasks for the Red Army.<sup>75</sup>

Sixth, the Comintern totally condemned Li Li-san's organizational methods.

The real struggle of the masses had been replaced by attempts to organize conspiratorial meetings all over China. Instead of real organization and preparation of a mass political strike, in April four general political strikes, in May five, were called without necessary organization and preparation. The merging of party and Komsomol cells, the shift in Red Trade Unions to the exclusive preparation of uprisings, have disorganized the work of the party and trade unions. Thus it has come to seem that separate party, Komsomol, and trade union organizations are not needed in the revolution, that the revolution will begin with the liquidation of the party, the Komsomol, and the trade unions. Instead of working to carry out the real tasks of the revolution, comrade Li Li-san, carried away by fantasies, has covered with a pseudo-Left phrase his passivity in carrying out the real, the most important tasks of the present time.<sup>76</sup>

In this way the Comintern attempted to explain the scope and nature of Li Li-san's "deviation." In the last section of the letter the Comintern restated its policy for the CCP—a policy that it had first given some two years before at the Sixth Congress of the CCP and had repeated several times since then. The basic directives were: (1) the immediate establishment of a "genuine workers' and peasants' Red Army . . . which is to be fully and completely under the control of the CCP and have a firm material base in one or several soviet areas"; (2) the immediate creation of a soviet government, which "must be formed on the territorial base of the revolution and be supported by the Red Army." Finally, the Comintern demanded (3) "truly revolutionary" mass work in soviet and non-soviet territories. Every economic struggle, every strike, every mass action in the non-soviet territories was seen to be of "direct, most immediate assistance to the soviet areas." It was

. . . necessary to develop the peasant movement in the as yet non-soviet areas, to develop guerrilla war there, *to surround the towns, including the middle-sized and biggest ones, by a ring of peasant unrest*, to organize our forces in the militarist armies, to increase tenfold our work in these armies, i.e. to disorganize KMT power, to shatter it every-

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.



where. Only in this way can the armed uprising in the big industrial centers be prepared. . . .<sup>77</sup>

The Comintern had attempted to remove the Li Li-san leadership quietly at the Third Plenum and to preserve some semblance of Chinese control over party affairs; it had failed. Discarding appearances, it now brought all its power to bear by calling for the entire party membership to oppose Li Li-san and by sending to China its top specialist on CCP affairs to ensure that there would be no further mistakes in the execution of Comintern policy.

The November 16 letter itself was sufficient to cause the removal of Li Li-san from the Central Politburo; he was shortly called to Moscow to account for his policies.<sup>78</sup> The Comintern now seemed bent on a much larger objective—removal of the entire “left” faction from the party leadership. Assigned to this task was Pavel Mif, who arrived soon after the November 16 letter.<sup>79</sup> His arrival tipped the balance among the

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87 (emphasis added). By *militarist armies* the Comintern evidently meant both those of the Kuomintang and the warlords.

<sup>78</sup> See chap. x, Conclusion.

<sup>79</sup> There is considerable confusion about the time of Mif's arrival in China. Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 307, John E. Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition, 1927–1935*, p. 238, Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , p. 207, and Robert C. North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*, p. 140, all assume that Mif arrived in China some time between May and June, 1930, with the returned students. But the facts that he spoke at the Sixteenth Party Congress of the CPSU in June–July (see above, p. 160) and that both party leaders and others at the time placed his arrival at the end of 1930, suggest rather convincingly that he did not arrive in China until after the Comintern's November 16 letter. The KMT's agent in the Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern in Shanghai reported that the reason for the Ch'en faction's vacillation about adopting a strong anti-Central position even though adopting a strong anti-Li-Li-san position after the arrival of the November 16 letter was because “the Comintern representative Mif had not yet arrived in China,” *Secret*, sec. 12. Hsü Hsi-ken's account is even more enlightening. Li had ousted Hsü from the Kiangsu organization early in 1929 (see chap. iii), but the Central brought him back into its organization after Li's removal. His account was made after his defection to the KMT in 1931.

“Before the Comintern letter arrived in November, Lo Chang-lung and others wanted Ch'en Shao-yü, etc. to unite with them to oppose the Li-san line, but Ch'en told them: ‘Li's control is extremely strong. We'll talk about this after the Comintern letter arrives.’ That meant to wait for . . . Mif to instruct them in their plan of opposition. . . . [The November 16] letter and Mif's instructions arrived at the same time. Then they were very courageous and brave, beginning an anti-Li-san movement. Not long after this their ‘boss’ Mif also arrived in China as Comintern representative, further boosting their strength.” (*Chuan pien*, p. 58.)

Additional evidence points to the same conclusion. See *ibid.*, pp. 32–38, and Yüan Ping-hui correspondence with the author. Hsiang Chung-fa also presents a similar story: “At this time [August, 1930] Ch'ü Ch'ü-pai and others also arrived

factions heavily in favor of the Ch'en Shao-yü group that, while combating the Ho Meng-hsiung faction, had remained scrupulously neutral toward the Central since the Third Plenum. Ch'en and the rest of the "twenty-eight Bolsheviks" who had been protégés of Mif at the Sun Yat-sen Academy in Moscow now comprised a formidable force, more powerful than either of the two other main factions in the party.

*Rear-Guard Action by the Central*

Meanwhile, seeking to hold its position within the party, the Central faction, without Li Li-san, convened a meeting on November 22 in Shanghai to formulate a response to the Comintern's letter. Eight of the possible ten or so who attended the meeting can be positively identified. They are Hsiang Chung-fa, Chou En-lai, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Yüan Ping-hui, Hsü Hsi-ken, Lu Ting-i, Liu Ming-fo, and Wen Yu-ch'eng.<sup>80</sup> Hsiang, Ch'ü, and Chou dominated the proceedings, which focused on two separate but related points. First, the participants clearly intended to place themselves on record as having criticized Li Li-san's errors. If their own positions were to be saved, Li Li-san would have to become a scapegoat. They discussed his errors at length and with relish. Second, and perhaps more immediately important, the meeting sought to draw up some reply to the November 16 letter. While there was unanimous agreement that Li had committed grave errors, there was considerable disagreement over the form the reply to the Comintern should take.

Ch'ü, Chou, and Liu Ming-fo, apparently still more worried about the threat from within than from the Comintern, urged that the Central issue a circular-resolution reiterating that the Third Plenum followed the Comintern's line. This, they believed, would answer the challenge of the Ch'en Shao-yü group, which had risen against the Central since Mif's arrival.<sup>81</sup> Hsiang took the more orthodox position that the Central agree with every point raised in the November letter, entirely repudiating its former position.<sup>82</sup> When it became apparent during the course of the

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and the Third Plenum was opened under Ch'ü's leadership. The results of the Third Plenum were opposed by the majority of the party rank and file and the Comintern then sent Mif to China . . ." Statement of Hsiang Chung-fa in *Chuan pien*, p. 334.

<sup>80</sup> *Cheng chih chü k'uo ta hui chi lu* (Minutes of the Enlarged Politburo Meeting), Nov. 22, 1930.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, leaf 38.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, leaf 44 and 56.

discussion that some compromise between the two positions was inevitable, Lu Ting-i and Yüan Ping-hui both suggested that the Central take the position that the Third Plenum was basically correct but that it did not point out all of Li Li-san's errors.<sup>83</sup> All agreed to make this compromise.

The November 25 resolution reflected the compromise of the November 22 meeting. In general, the Third Plenum was seen to have supported the Comintern Line. Li Li-san, it read, had recognized his mistakes at the Plenum, but did not reveal the basic contradictions between his position and that of the Comintern. The resolution concluded that the Central completely agreed with the November 16 letter, but added the confusing note that the Li Li-san line must be explained according to the resolutions of the Third Plenum.<sup>84</sup> The Central had made a grudging admission of error, but was still struggling to reconcile the irreconcilable: That the Third Plenum was generally correct (to forestall attack from within the party) and that the Central had fully accepted the Comintern's censure (to preclude attack from Moscow).

As soon as the November 16 letter was disseminated, the attack against Li Li-san reached its zenith. His opposition—the Ho faction, but increasingly the Ch'en faction, which had turned violently against the Central after Mif's arrival—linked the Central inextricably with Li Li-san. The Central, on the other hand, strove to dissociate itself from the taint of "Li Li-sanism" by attempting to lead the campaign against "Li Li-sanist" elements in the party. From late November a spate of articles appeared in the Central's publications, especially in *Shih-hua*, attacking Li Li-san.<sup>85</sup>

Ho Meng-hsiung, meanwhile, had modified his previous demand for an immediate emergency conference and dismissed any thought of holding one of his own for the time being. News had apparently filtered back to him that if he convened an emergency conference outside the party apparatus, he would place himself in grave physical danger.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the reason, Ho sent a telegram to the ECCI, saying that "... in order to accept the Comintern line and liquidate the Li Li-san line the

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, leaf 61-62.

<sup>84</sup> *Secret*, sec. 8; *Chou Report*, Jan. 3, Sec. 8; Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo Report), sec. 8; *Fourth Plenum Resolution*, sec. 4.

<sup>85</sup> See especially Nos. 2, 5, and 9, and the articles by Lo Mai and Chia Ch'iang.

<sup>86</sup> *Secret*, sec. 13.

CCP Central must convene the Fourth Plenum. Circumstances do not permit the calling of an emergency conference at this time, nor is one necessary."<sup>87</sup>

The concatenation of events is, at best, unclear. Whether as a result of Ho's telegram or not, Mif, who had now been in China for several weeks, was able to "persuade" the Central Politburo at a meeting on December 14 to agree to convene the Fourth Plenum. Its tasks would be to accept the Comintern line, denounce the Third Plenum, and to remove all those who were part of the Li Li-san line.<sup>88</sup> This meeting was critical. Mif had worked sedulously since his arrival, garnering support in the party for the Comintern position. The Ch'en faction naturally sided with him to a man. More important, Mif apparently came to an agreement with Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai at the December 14 meeting that in return for his cooperation at the Fourth Plenum Ch'ü would retain a position in the Central Politburo. In addition, and probably unknown to Ch'ü, Hsiang Chung-fa and Chou En-lai quietly defected from the Central to the Mif-Ch'en group in fact but not yet in name. Evidence for this lies in the fact that the revised section of Chou's speech to the Third Plenum, rewritten just before the opening of the Fourth Plenum, and the entire section of Hsiang's speech to the Fourth Plenum regarding the

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> (Wang) T'ieh-ch'ang, "Fan tui Li-san lu hsien tou cheng ti ching kuo" (The Story of the Struggle against the Li Li-san Line), *Tang-ti chien-she* (Reconstruction of the Party), No. 3, sec. 2 (Feb. 15, 1931). I do not discuss the Fu-t'ien incident of December 8, 1930, in this study. The evidence on the issue is scarce and contradictory. The best that can be said is that Fu-t'ien and Huangp'o appear to have been the scenes of a conflict between two Communist factions in the soviet areas, one of which espoused support for Li Li-san and the other for Mao Tse-tung. See Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , chap. v, for a discussion of some of the evidence.

The Soviet interpretation of the Fu-t'ien incident has just been made public, but it must be evaluated in the context of current Sino-Soviet relations. "Mao Tse-tung did not hesitate to use even physical destruction in his struggle against Communists who disagreed with him. In this respect, attention is drawn to events which took place in December, 1930, in the city of Fu-t'ien, when, at Mao Tse-tung's orders, troops loyal to him destroyed the party, Soviet, and Komsomol organizations in Kiangsi province and subjected their leaders to cruel repressions. A party document written immediately after these events, reads: 'Mao Tse-tung . . . had decided to destroy physically the leading cadres of the party and youth league in Kiangsi province and to create a party bearing exclusively the hue of the Mao Tse-tungist group in order to use it as a tool in his struggle against the Central Committee.'" (O. Vladimirov and V. Riazantsev, "O nekotorykh voprosakh istorii kompartii Kitaia" [On Several Questions of the History of the CCP], *Kommunist*, No. 9 [June, 1968], p. 103.)



events after the Third Plenum, were absolutely identical, verbatim attacks on the Li Li-san line, the Third Plenum, and the post-Third Plenum Central.<sup>89</sup> The corresponding section of the final Fourth Plenum resolution, written by Mif, was a very close paraphrase of the Chou-Hsiang documents.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Ch'ü was edged off the Politburo immediately after the Fourth Plenum, while both Chou and Hsiang were retained.

Further support for the hypothesis is contained in the Central circulars themselves. Before the December 14 meeting, the Central had issued a circular on December 9 and a "letter to all comrades." While admitting the charges made in the November 16 letter, the Central clung tenaciously to the view that the Third Plenum (which Ch'ü himself had chaired) was generally in harmony with the Comintern's line, and that the anti-Li Li-san campaign could be conducted at least partially on the basis of the resolutions of the Third Plenum.<sup>91</sup> After the December 14 meeting, the Central abruptly shifted positions. On December 16, two resolutions were passed by the Central Politburo. One rescinded the penalty imposed upon Chang Kuo-t'ao *in absentia* by the Third Plenum and acknowledged that body's error; the other abolished the punishments meted out the preceding June for the "returned students" Ch'en Shao-yü, Ch'in Pang-hsien, Wang Chia-hsiang, and Ho Tzu-shu, for criticism of Li Li-san's policies.<sup>92</sup> One week later, on December 23rd, the Politburo promulgated Circular No. 96, which marked a complete reversal of previous stands and a total acceptance of the CI position. The relevant passage reads:

From Central Circular No. 70 through the Hupeh conference of representatives and the soviet areas delegates' conference, the Li Li-san line was formed. The June 11 resolution marked its acceptance in the Politburo. Li Li-san's line thus became the Central's line and controlled the entire party. From this time until the Third Plenum, the Central

<sup>89</sup> *Chou Report*, Jan. 3, sec. 8, and Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao* (Central Politburo Report), sec. 8.

<sup>90</sup> See *Fourth Plenum Resolution*, secs. 3, 4.

<sup>91</sup> *Chou Report*, Jan. 3, sec. 8; Hsiang, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao*, sec. 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Kuan yü* [Chang] Kuo-t'ao *t'ung chih ti chüeh i* (Resolution on Comrade [Chang] Kuo-t'ao), and *Chung yang kuan yü ch'ü hsiao Ch'en Shao-yü, Ch'in Pang-hsien, Wang Chia-hsiang, Ho Tzu-shu, ssu t'ung chih ti ch'u fen wen t'i ti chüeh i* (Central Resolution Rescinding the Punishment of the Four Comrades Ch'en Shao-yü, Ch'in Pang-hsien, Wang Chia-hsiang, and Ho Tzu-shu), Dec. 16, 1930.

carried out an adventurist-putschist policy on the basis of an anti-Comintern line, which disguised opportunistic practice, led to a weakening of the party, its defeat, and strengthened the position of the right-opportunists. The Third Plenum was originally called to accept the Comintern line, but because it accepted it from the standpoint of a compromise position, the result was that the Third Plenum's line became a continuation of the Li Li-san line, giving added protection to it.<sup>93</sup>

The stage was now set for the Fourth Plenum.

#### *The Fourth Plenum*

The Fourth Plenum marked the formal repudiation of Li Li-sanism in the CCP as well as the elimination of both "right" and "left" factions as they had existed since 1928. It saw the establishment of a new leadership generally untainted by factional loyalties. These leaders had been trained extensively at the Sun Yat-sen Academy in Moscow and were wholly responsive to "international" Communist over "local" Chinese interests. In other words, the new leadership of the CCP, installed at the Fourth Plenum, was composed of Stalinist organization men.

The Plenum itself was held on January 16, 1931.<sup>94</sup> On that day the Ho faction was notified that a meeting would be held, but not informed that it was to be the Fourth Plenum. In the short time available, Ho Meng-hsiung mustered fifteen other members of his faction and proceeded to the appointed place.<sup>95</sup> The Central and the Mif-Ch'en groups were already present, with a total of nineteen men.<sup>96</sup> It was not until Pavel Mif began to deliver his report that the Ho faction realized they

<sup>93</sup> *Chung yang chin chi t'ung kao* (Central Emergency Circular), Central Circular No. 96, Dec. 23, 1930, sec. 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Secret*, sec. 13. The following account of the Fourth Plenum draws heavily on this source.

<sup>95</sup> These included Ho, Lo Chang-lung, Chang Ch'uan-pao, Ch'en Yu, Wang Jo-fei, Yü Fei, Wang K'e-ch'üan, Shen Hsien-hsüan, and others (*ibid.*).

<sup>96</sup> The central group consisted of Hsiang Chung-fa, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, Chou En-lai, Li Wei-han (Lo Mai), and a few others. The Ch'en faction was composed of Ch'en Shao-yü, Shen Tse-min, Wang Ch'iao, Wang Chia-hsiang, Ch'en Yüan-tao, Jen Pi-shih, and others (*ibid.*). Agnes Smedley in *The Great Road*, p. 294, claims that Mao Tse-tung sent representatives to the Fourth Plenum. I see no evidence that such representatives attended the Plenum, but if they attended they were neither identified as representing Mao's interests nor did they affect the outcome of the Plenum. The Fourth Plenum was essentially a three-cornered affair, with the Mif-Ch'en group supported by the Central faction against Ho Meng-hsiung.

were attending the "Fourth Plenum" for which they had been clamoring. Unprepared and outnumbered, they attempted to withdraw. Mif would not permit them to leave and, perhaps anticipating such a reaction, had several members of the party's special affairs (*T'e Wu*) section armed and present to enforce his will.<sup>97</sup> The members of the Ho faction were thus a captive audience at the Plenum, which lasted for four hours. They were outvoted on every issue, including Ho's attempt to put through a resolution deferring the meeting to some later time.

As chairman of the meeting, Pavel Mif did most of the talking, permitting discussion only by members of the Ch'en group, Chou En-lai, and Hsiang Chung-fa, who reported to the meeting on the Li-san line and events leading up to the present Plenum.<sup>98</sup> Mif allowed Ho and his men no opportunity to rebut the arguments of the Central-Ch'en group or to express their own position. Paradoxically, the main demands of the Ho faction were met. The Fourth Plenum was held, the Li Li-san line attacked and repudiated, and the party leadership changed.<sup>99</sup> But it was not the Ho faction that succeeded the Li Li-san leadership. Instead of being promoted to the party leadership, as their numerical support perhaps warranted, they were shunted aside by the Comintern's representative and a new group installed—the Ch'en Shao-yü faction.

Mif's conduct in China during this period is a classic example of coalition strategy. Three groups vied for the leadership of the CCP after the Third Plenum: the Ch'en Shao-yü faction, which Mif supported; the Central faction, which was striving to hold on to its position; and the "right" opposition, represented by Ho Meng-hsiung. Mif formed a coalition with the Central faction (at the December 14 Politburo meeting) to oppose the Ho faction. They were defeated at the Fourth Plenum, and Ho himself was physically eliminated shortly thereafter. (On January 18, Ho Meng-hsiung was arrested by the Kuomintang and executed on February 7.<sup>100</sup> It was suspected that a member of the Ch'en faction betrayed him to the Nationalists.<sup>101</sup> Ho's arrest broke the back of the "right" opposition even though Lo Chang-lung subsequently assumed

<sup>97</sup> *Secret*, sec. 13.

<sup>98</sup> Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao*, his Report to the Fourth Plenum.

<sup>99</sup> *Fourth Plenum Resolution*, *passim*.

<sup>100</sup> *Secret*, sec. 13.A.2; Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , p. 130, says Jan. 17 and gives the date of Ho's execution.

<sup>101</sup> *Secret*, sec 14.2.

the leadership of the faction, opposing the results of the Fourth Plenum.)

Mif kept his agreement with the Central faction by rewarding them with posts in the reorganized Central. The new leadership elected at the Fourth Plenum saw Hsiang Chung-fa re-elected as General Secretary. Chou En-lai remained on the Central standing committee, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai was retained in the Central but lowered from his briefly held position as *de facto* head of the party to chief of the organizational bureau, and Lo Mai was named chief of military affairs.<sup>102</sup> Ch'en Shao-yü and Chang Wen-t'ien, of the returned students, were raised to posts in the Central—Ch'en to the Central standing committee and Chang as concurrent head of the propaganda, peasant, and women departments. Thus, as a result of the Fourth Plenum, the Central faction appeared to retain its dominant position. The appearance was deceptive and brief.

When the "right" opposition had been disposed of, Mif turned against the Central faction, against Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai in particular. Recall that Mif had obtained the secret defection of Hsiang Chung-fa and Chou En-lai from the Central faction. The Fourth Plenum's final resolution had dealt at length with the errors of the Third Plenum and named Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai as being chiefly responsible for that debacle.<sup>103</sup> Hsiang's speech, as well as Chou's revised speech, repeated this charge,<sup>104</sup> preparing the ground for what happened immediately after the Fourth Plenum. In a general reshuffle of the Politburo leadership a few days after the Plenum, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai and Lo Mai were dropped from the Politburo and replaced by members of the Ch'en faction. This was the composition of the reorganized Politburo: Hsiang Chung-fa remained as General Secretary and Chou En-lai as a member of the Central standing committee, their reward for defecting from the Central faction and proving themselves "good" Communists. All other posts were filled by Mif's "twenty-eight Bolsheviks." Ch'en Shao-yü moved up, holding concurrent positions on the Central standing committee and chief of the Kiangsu provincial organization. Shen Tse-min was named to the Politburo, Chang Wen-t'ien retained the posts assigned to him at the Fourth Plenum, Ch'in Pang-hsien was promoted to the head of Communist

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 13.

<sup>103</sup> *Fourth Plenum Resolution*, sec. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Hsiang Chung-fa, *Chung yang cheng chih chü pao kao*, sec. 8, and Chou Report, Jan. 3, sec. 8.



Youth, Wang Yün-ch'eng took over Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's former post as organizational bureau chief, and three other members of the "twenty-eight Bolsheviks" were assigned to posts in the Central apparatus.<sup>105</sup>

### *The Fourth Plenum—An Evaluation*

The Fourth Plenum signaled the final victory of the Comintern over the CCP's deviation. By first allying with the Central to defeat the "right," then turning against the Central, Mif successfully installed his protégés, the Russian returned students, in command of the CCP. The Plenum formally interred the Li Li-san line, although the new leadership continued to apply the stigma of "Li Li-sanist" to its opponents. It accepted the Comintern's policies as outlined in its directives over the preceding two years, particularly the Comintern letter of July 23.

Despite its victory, the Comintern considered the situation within the Chinese Communist Party to be sufficiently critical to order immediate preparations for the party's Seventh National Congress. The fact that the Seventh Congress was not held until 1945 does not imply that the crisis in the CCP resolved itself; other factors must be adduced to account for the postponement. (During 1931, the internal party crisis was reflected in the stream of disillusioned party members who defected to the Nationalists.)<sup>106</sup>

The Fourth Plenum's resolution dwelt at length on the errors of Li Li-san, and their consequences for the party in soviet and non-soviet areas. It dealt with the Central's "compromise" attitude at the Third Plenum and the mistakes made by the Central under Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's leadership after the arrival of the Comintern's November 16 letter and Li Li-san's removal. An important point must be made here. Neither the November 16 letter nor the Fourth Plenum resolution dealt to any significant degree with Comintern policy *per se*. Both documents were concerned fundamentally with the factional struggle in the party and the issue of party discipline, that is, obedience to Moscow.<sup>107</sup> When policy

<sup>105</sup> *Secret*, sec. 13.C.2.

<sup>106</sup> A key source for this study, *Chuan pien*, which comprises the statements of important party leaders who defected, testifies to the growing disillusionment in the CCP's ranks and belief in its imminent collapse.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism* . . . , pp. 169ff., for a curious interpretation of these two letters. In particular, he sees the November 16 letter of the CI as "simply a return to the position of Li Li-san before the Politburo letter of

guidelines are sought for the period of July to December, 1930, the Comintern's July 23 letter is cited along with documents of the Sixth Congress, lending further support to the view that Comintern policy remained consistent throughout the struggle with the CCP leadership.

The "right" and the "left" factions as they had existed since the Sixth Congress of 1928 were effectively disestablished. Of members of the right faction, Ho Meng-hsiung's fate has been recounted; Lo Chang-lung and Wang K'e-ch'üan, the two remaining leaders, were formally dismissed from the party later in January, 1931, for continuing to carry on anti-party activities.<sup>108</sup> Of the left faction, Hsiang Chung-fa was apprehended by the Kuomintang in June, 1931, and executed. Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai was removed from party affairs after the Fourth Plenum and assigned to work in the literary-cultural field. He was captured and executed by the Kuomintang in 1935. Only Chou En-lai managed to survive in the CCP top hierarchy, doing so on the basis of demonstrated subservience to Moscow. Li Li-san returned to Moscow in late 1930 to "stand trial" for his erroneous policies. He was condemned to "study" in Moscow for fifteen years, and did not return to China until 1945.<sup>109</sup> After 1949 he was appointed as a party secretary to the North China bureau—a post he managed to retain until the advent of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when he is reported to have committed suicide.<sup>110</sup>

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June 11." More accurately, the November letter was a reaffirmation of the position taken by the CI before the adoption of Li's June 11 resolution.

<sup>108</sup> Hsiao, *Power Relations* . . . , pp. 135 and 132, respectively.

<sup>109</sup> See North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*, p. 145.

<sup>110</sup> See "Li Li-san's Letter to Mao Tse-tung," *Facts and Features*, I, No. 19 (July 10, 1968), p. 29.

# 10 / Conclusions

## *Comintern Policy toward the Chinese Communists*

Comintern policy in China was based on the oldest of political maxims: Strike where your opponent is the weakest. From 1928 on the Comintern advocated a policy of guerrilla warfare and subversion—a policy first formulated at the Ninth Plenum of the ECCI in early 1928, set forth at the Sixth Congress of the CCP, and further elaborated in directives to the CCP over the following two and one-half years. The basic plan was to build up a political-military force in the Chinese hinterland that would eventually become powerful enough to enable the Communists to challenge the Kuomintang for control of China. Implicit in the Comintern's concept was the recognition that the Chinese Communists were no match for the KMT at the time, and would not be for the foreseeable future.

The Comintern directed the CCP to establish soviet bases in areas of the Chinese countryside out of easy reach of KMT forces, and to consolidate such bases by carrying out the “agrarian revolution” in them. The CCP was to establish soviet governments in which the masses would participate, and to create, arm, and train small fighting detachments, which could gradually be formed into a Chinese Red Army.

Soviet bases thus consolidated would support further expansion of Communist power into nearby towns and the adjacent countryside and provide the necessary protection for the survival of the Communists' own governmental apparatus.

By means of well-planned guerrilla activity and, where possible, mobile warfare, the Communists were instructed to bring the vast countryside between the soviet bases and the Kuomintang-controlled larger cities under their control, gradually restricting the territory over which the KMT could exercise suzerainty and extend protection. Coordinating their activities with guerrilla warfare operations, the Communists were to infiltrate a target area, terrorize local officials, organize the "poor and middle" peasantry against the rich, recruit men and supplies for the Red Army, and establish the nucleus of a future local soviet government. When these combined activities were sufficiently advanced, "spontaneous" uprisings would occur, which the Communists would direct and support with their own guerrilla forces. Once the KMT was no longer able to provide adequate protection for the people of a given area of the countryside, it would be relatively easy for the Communists to achieve their objectives, for as long as they retained the initiative they would always be able to concentrate superior forces to overcome local defenses.

The Comintern ordered activity in both city and countryside. There was never any question of activity in *only* the city or the countryside, nor was there at any time a shift from city to countryside. It was always a matter of relative emphasis. During the period under study the emphasis was clearly on the countryside, but the cities played an important role. In the larger administrative and industrial areas infiltration of the trade unions, organization of mass demonstrations, direction of the strike movement, and so forth was designed not as a prelude to armed uprisings in these cities (at least not in the short run), but to prevent the KMT from concentrating its efforts on the main Chinese Communist build-up in the countryside. Strikes, propaganda, terror, and sabotage were to be employed to keep the cities in turmoil.

In the strategy as a whole, the CCP's urban activities played a key diversionary role. Guerrilla warfare and its related activities were the means by which Communists could bring areas of the countryside under their control; soviets were the political instruments by which the Communists could consolidate their grip on these areas. The objective of the



Comintern was not the rapid overthrow of the Nationalist regime by means of armed uprisings in the larger cities all over China. Rather, the Comintern envisaged a protracted struggle during which the CCP would gradually weaken the KMT and build up its own strength. Under such a strategy, attacks on the centers of state power—the major cities—would not be initiated until after the balance of forces had shifted decisively in favor of the Communists.

Comintern strategy remained constant throughout the period of study. This continuity of policy can best be demonstrated by a brief textual comparison of directives sent to the CCP immediately before and after the activation of the Li Li-san line in the summer and fall of 1930 (the Comintern's directives of July 23 and November 16). The Sixth Congress of the CCP had emphasized three basic concepts: the establishment of soviet political power, the creation of a tough, fighting force, and mass organizational work in town and country, soviet and non-soviet areas. Both the July and November letters reiterated these basic concepts. The July 23 letter reads,

. . . the soviet movement has placed before the party the task of organizing a central soviet government and regulating its activities. . . . [However,] the party must proceed from the position that the latter can acquire the necessary strength and significance only if it organizes a real Red Army in the most secure area, under the complete control of the leadership of the CCP, and capable of serving as a support to the government . . . (sec. 5).

The entire activity of the party and all measures of its revolutionary organs in soviet areas must be subordinated to the interests of the genuine mass struggle of the peasantry, the interests of the further development of the peasant movement, the interests of strengthening the alliance between the workers and peasants under the leading role of the proletariat, the interests of the consolidation of the power of the soviets and the further expansion of soviet districts. With this purpose the party must utilize all resources in the soviet areas for the organization of the workers' and peasants' Red Army. It is essential to ensure completely the control and leadership of the party over the Red Army, which must play an extremely important role in the further development of the revolutionary struggle. The Red Army must be transformed into a genuinely national army . . . (sec. 10).

[In non-soviet areas] the party must struggle for the further development of the strike movement, for the organization and direction of the economic battles of the Chinese proletariat. In coordinating the economic and political struggle the party must exert every effort for the develop-

ment of political strikes. . . . Increasing its work in the mass Yellow unions, the party must strengthen in every way the Red trade unions . . . (sec. 12).<sup>1</sup>

Although the greater part of the November letter was a denunciation of the Li Li-san line, it emphasized the same concepts. In the section on the "key practical tasks of the party" the same three points were made:

First, [the party must] immediately knock together a real workers' and peasants' Red Army. If at first this army consists of forty or fifty thousand men, it must be worker and peasant in its social composition, with a basically workers' command staff, with a strong Communist skeleton, headed by the best, most reliable leaders with iron discipline. This army, which must be fully and completely under the control of the CCP, must have a firm material base in one or several soviet areas, which are to serve as the territorial base of the revolution. . . .

Second, [the party must] immediately create a firm, efficient soviet government . . . attracting to it the most outstanding non-party workers, peasants, and Red Army men. The soviet government must be formed on the territorial base of the revolution and must rest on the Red Army. The soviet government will work out and promulgate its program . . . it will show the toiling masses that soviet power can build a new life for them without the imperialists and landowners. The implementation of the poor and middle peasant agrarian revolution, a radical improvement in the situation of the working class, the creation of a new governmental apparatus with the bold advancement of workers and peasants, the establishment of mass organizations (trade unions, groups of the poor, and so forth), a correct economic policy, will necessarily rally millions of the masses of workers and peasants in the soviet territories around the soviets.

Third, the party must undertake truly revolutionary mass work; Bolshevik organization of the masses in the soviet territories, development of the mass economic and political struggle and organization of the masses in the process of this struggle in the non-soviet territories. The CCP must learn that every economic struggle, every strike, every mass action in the non-soviet areas is not merely a step towards the organization of the masses and thus a step on the path to the armed uprising, but a direct, most immediate help to the soviet districts.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Chung kuo wen t'i chüeh i an—kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei cheng chih pi shu ch'u i chiu san ling nien ch'i yüeh erh shih san jih t'ung kuo" (Resolution on the Chinese Question—Passed by the Political Secretariat of the ECCI on July 23, 1930), *Shih-hua*, No. 1, Oct. 30, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei kei chung kung chung yang ti hsin" (ECCI Letter to CCP Central), Nov. 16, 1930, *Kuo-chi lu-hsien*, sec. 3.

*The Li Li-san Line*

Stripped of its ideological trappings, the Li Li-san line was an attempt to organize a nationwide revolution to overthrow the Nationalist regime and to establish an urban-based soviet army and government. Li Li-san's plan consisted of demonstrations and strikes leading to armed uprisings in most if not all of China's major urban centers. These urban uprisings were then to be the signal for local uprisings throughout the countryside, mutinies in previously infiltrated Nationalist garrisons, and attacks by the combined forces of the Red Army on the cities of Nanchang, Kiuchiang, and ultimately on Wuhan, the proposed seat of Li's urban soviet regime. Thus, while the Comintern ordered a policy that would involve neither large gains nor losses, Li Li-san chose a policy of all or nothing, or as Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai aptly put it, Li Li-san wanted "to risk his life on a single throw."<sup>3</sup>

At Li's trial in late December, 1930, after he had been recalled to Moscow, Comintern officials elaborated further on the nature of the "Li Li-san line."<sup>4</sup> Madyar criticized Li's decision to attack Changsha. "All of the CCP's leaders have heard: Your Red Army is too weak, and cannot win over the big cities. All of the responsible comrades, Stalin, Molotov, and others, explained this to the Chinese comrades. Stalin said—don't go to Changsha, it's no good. Molotov said:—at present the strength of the Red Army is insufficient to take big cities." Nevertheless the attacks were undertaken.<sup>5</sup> Madyar went on to discuss Li's policies in the workers' movement. He accused the CCP of neglecting "all work in the Yellow unions . . . and union work in general." The Chinese comrades, he said, "promised" that they would carry out the economic struggle in the unions, but "as soon as the opportunity arose, they immediately ceased work in the Yellow unions, dissolved the Red unions, and stopped the economic struggle."<sup>6</sup>

Another of Li Li-san's examiners, a Comrade P'i, possibly Piatnitsky,

<sup>3</sup> Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, *To-yü ti-hua* (Superfluous Words), p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Those on the examining board were Otto Kuusinen, Dmitri Manuilsky, Madyar, Safarov, Bela Kun, Huang P'ing, Chang Kuo-t'ao, Ts'ai Ho-shen, and a Comrade P'i.

<sup>5</sup> "Kung ch'an kuo chi chih wei chu hsi t'uan tui yü Li-san lu hsien ti t'ao lun" (ECCI Discussion of the Li-san Line), Dec. 1930, *Pu-erh-se-wei-k'e*, IV, No. 3 (May 10, 1931), 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

criticized his organizational tactics. He discussed Li's argument that all the workers wanted was uprisings, not strikes. "Yet, who carried out the uprisings? You know," he said to Li Li-san, "'that you could have led uprisings through the party cells and the CY. Yet . . . the party cells and the CY were dissolved. How could uprisings be led?" Then, referring to the establishment of the action committees, which replaced the party organizations, Comrade P'i said, "the Central organized an all-powerful general staff, but without a military general staff . . . . The decisions of this general staff . . . were not carried out."<sup>7</sup>

Of his examiners, however, only Manuisky and Kuusinen attempted to explain the reason for Li's "line." Manuisky believed that all of Li's errors stemmed from "one basic error," which was his estimate of the future development of the Chinese revolution and the whole international situation. "Here we discover the anti-Marxist-Leninist policy of putschism—the standpoint of Li Li-san and his faction." Manuisky compared the Chinese situation in 1930 with the Russian position in Poland in 1920. Then, he said, Lenin had decided to pull back from Warsaw even though an upsurge of the workers' movement existed along with a severe world crisis. "Why?" he asked. Because Lenin had realized that the Soviet attack on Warsaw beat against the entire Versailles treaty system. "Now the Chinese revolution encounters the whole Versailles system. Can the present mission of the Chinese revolution—in its present stage, in the pattern of the present world crisis, under the present conditions of the CCP—be to destroy this system? . . . Can you use your own strength, even relying on the Soviet Union, relying on your own Red Army to destroy this system?"<sup>8</sup> Manuisky answered his own question.

The strength of the world's workers' movement is still inadequate. . . . Several countries are having political crises. Still, there are not enough crises—we cannot destroy the whole Versailles system. On today's international stage there are great events. But you see only your own shell, your own internal relations, and do not see the whole complex and interlocking international environment. This is your error.<sup>9</sup>

"Li Li-san," Manuisky concluded, "you have manifested a severe regionalism. All other problems develop from this . . . . You are only

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



a good revolutionary but not a good Communist, Comrade Li Li-san! You are still a very bad Bolshevik."<sup>10</sup>

Manuilsky's suggestion that Li Li-san was more a nationalist than a Communist is certainly a valid interpretation of the Li Li-san line from the world perspective of the Comintern, but is hardly an adequate explanation of it. Otto Kuusinen came closer to at least a partial explanation of the reason for the Li Li-san line when he stated that Li and his followers never developed as they should have the "mass strike movement in the industrial centers to support the soviet movement, but they did just the opposite . . . they prepared not strikes, but armed uprisings . . ."<sup>11</sup> Kuusinen's statement that the urban movement was subordinate to the soviet movement provides one of the clues, I believe, to an explanation of the Li Li-san line. It is always difficult to ascribe motives to actions, but the following hypothesis appears consistent with the facts.

The commanders in the field had become powerful figures in the Chinese Communist movement as a result of the successful guerrilla warfare in late 1929–1930. Li Li-san's realization that real power was slipping from the Central Committee in Shanghai to these commanders, mainly to Mao Tse-tung, seems to have been one of the decisive factors precipitating the development of the "Li Li-san line." His basic aim was to counteract this slippage of power to the countryside, and to pre-empt the consolidation of party power by a rural-based leader, through the establishment of an urban-based Communist regime.

Another crucial element in the power equation was the Comintern. Li Li-san had little difficulty making his policy appear to be consistent with the Comintern's during the early months of his leadership (although some, like Hsü Hsi-ken, had noticed a discrepancy even then). As it

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* The current Soviet view of the Li Li-san line has Mao and Li "sharing" the same position, which is unsupportable. It also stresses an entirely different motive for Li's actions. "In 1930, the leadership of the CCP fell into the hands of elements with leftist leanings, headed by Li Li-san, who disregarding the actual conditions and ignoring the advice of the Comintern, began organizing an uprising in the whole country and seizing the cities by armed force. In setting out on this course, they hoped that the putschist actions in China would involve the Soviet Union in an armed conflict with imperialism and that, as a result of this, a world war would break out during which the international proletariat would rise in a world-wide revolution, thus insuring the victory of Socialism in China. This conception was also shared by Mao Tse-tung." "Korni nyneshnikh sobytii v Kitae" (The Roots of the Present Events in China), *Kommunist*, No. 6 (Apr. 13, 1968), p. 105.

became obvious from the end of 1929 that the Comintern demanded full support of the soviet movement, the disparity between Li's policies and the Comintern's became more and more apparent. From February, 1930, Li Li-san's postulation of nationwide revolution involving large-scale attacks on major urban centers contrasted severely with the Comintern's policy of gradual build-up in the countryside.

Li Li-san was caught between Comintern pressure to build up the soviet movement and the recognition that the growing power of the field commanders would eventually lead to his eclipse as party leader. Quite early in his leadership Li recognized the potential threat of the commanders in the field. In his early attempts to gain control over the soviet movement, Li adopted mainly delaying tactics designed to slow the rate of growth of the soviet movement in the hope that he might be able to gain control by organizational means. His failure to achieve this, coupled with the Comintern's increasingly insistent demands to support and develop the soviet movement, forced him to change his tactics. He set about building up the Red Army in order to use it for the same end—control of the Chinese Communist movement. Nationwide revolution whose outcome Li hoped would be the establishment of an urban-based regime would achieve this objective. The alternative was the eventual loss of real power in the Chinese Communist movement, or at best a status much like that of Hsiang Chung-fa, puppet Secretary General of the Party. Had he been successful, Li Li-san would presumably have emerged all-powerful in the Chinese Communist movement, and Mao Tse-tung, his principal rival, would have been eliminated.

The removal of Li Li-san and the re-establishment of Comintern policy of guerrilla warfare and subversion at the Fourth Plenum reopened the way for unhindered expansion of armed Communist power in the Chinese countryside and set the stage for the rise of Mao Tse-tung. Although there continued to be a certain degree of conflict between the "Central" and commanders in the field—after the transfer of the Central from Shanghai to the soviet areas in late 1931—the new Moscow-imposed leadership functioned mainly as the executor and coordinator of Comintern policy, while "real power" was consolidated by the military commanders.

The main conclusions of this study thus are four: First, the Comintern set forth in 1928 a policy of guerrilla warfare and subversion with emphasis on the countryside. Second, over the following two-and-a-

half-year period between June, 1928, and January, 1931, the Comintern consistently called for the application of this strategy in directives to the CCP Central. Third, the “Li Li-san line” was a deviation from the strategy set forth by the Comintern, as its core was the attempt to engineer nationwide uprisings centered on attacks by the Red Army on the centers of state power—the major cities. Fourth, the basic motivation for the “Li Li-san line” was essentially Li Li-san’s endeavor to secure the power of undivided party leadership in his own hands, and to prevent that power from passing into the hands of commanders of the growing Red Army, notably Mao Tse-tung.

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